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HIRAM'S FINISH:

OR,

FINAL GAMBOLS OF A GUILELESS GRANGER.

BY "FRED."

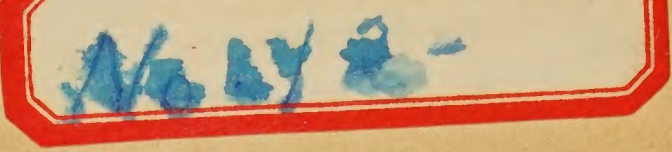


"Aha! the chariot waits, and the prancing steed madly champs its bit. Step right in, ma'am."

James C. Morris.

Box 687

Fairmont W. V. A.



HIRAM'S FINISH:

OR,

Final Gambols of a Guileless Granger.

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CHAPTER I.

HIRAM HAS A SURPRISE.

On the day following the events related in our last effort, something happened that induced Hiram to forego his ironclad resolution to go back to South Dusenbury.

This was the arrival of a new boarder at Mrs. Hash-ton's—one Miss Mamie Fly, a variety actress out of a job.

As we have shown in the past, the hayseed had a weakness for the fair sex, and for variety actresses in particular, and he took kindly to this one immediately.

And she encouraged his attentions, for she soon discovered that he had money, and might be of assistance to her until she got another engagement.

Miss Fly was a rather elderly girl; but she was well made up, and would pass in a crowd—if the crowd were large enough—for about twenty-nine and a half.

She had a four-dollar tow wig, an expensive set of teeth, a real Parisian complexion, and other modern luxuries which serve to lend grace and beauty to the fair sex.

When she and Hiram were introduced in the boarding-house parlor, the old man, after nearly shaking her arm off, said:

"I'm glad tew know yew, darned ef I ain't."

"And I am pleased to meet you," smiled the alleged actress.

"Yeou remind me of a gal I useter know daown tew the hotel," continued Hiram; "an' she was a stunner."

"You flatter me," said Miss Fly. "What was her name?"

"Calcium."

"Miss Calcium?"

"Yes. Know her?"

"I should murmur. Why, she and I used to be chums."

"Dew tell!"

"I am telling," grinned the actress. "So you know her?"

"Reckon I dew. She useter be kinder gone on me, tew."

"Oh, I can readily understand that."

And Miss Fly gave the hayseed one of her sweetest stage smiles.

Hiram grinned from ear to ear.

"Wa-al, I allers was a fav-rite with the gals."

"Of course you were."

"An' Miss Calcium was a mighty purty one—gum-swizzled if she wa'n't! She was one o' these here wimmen that act aout onter the stage."

"Oh, yes; I am in the profesh myself."

"In the which?"

"The profesh."

"What's that?"

"I mean that I am an actress."

Hiram's eyes bulged out about an inch.

"Yeou?"

"Certainly."

"I wanter know!"

"Well, you do know."

"I wouldn't ha' thought it."

He wouldn't, but a new-born babe would.

Hiram, however, was one of the sort of men that never become worldly, no matter what experience they pass through.

"Oh, yes; I've been on the stage since I was a child."

"Wa-al!"

"Yes, I was brought on when I was only six months old, played Eva in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' when I was eight years of age, and since then have been in the profesh continuously. Now I am a serio-comic."

"A what?"

"A serio-comic and lightning-change artist. I can make ten separate and distinct changes of costume inside of five minutes."

"Great gosh!"

"Yes, that's my specialty."

"I'd like tew see yeou act aout, blamed ef I wouldn't!"

"You may some day, but just now I am out of an engagement."

"Sho!"

"Yes; I was traveling with the Mammoth Allied Aggregation of American Artists and Band of Bewildering Beauties. But we struck bad biz in the far West, our leading beauty died of old age, and the snap busted."

"What did yeou dew then?"

"Well, most of the Aggregation had to foot it home, and some of them are taking in washing and splitting wood now. But I had the luck to strike an angel."

"Tew what?"

"To strike an angel. Don't you know what an angel is?"

"Wa-al, I've seen picters on 'em, but I never see a reel one, an' ef I did I don't think I'd strike it."

Miss Fly smiled vociferously.

"Oh, I don't mean the kind of an angel you do, Mr. Jay."

"No?"

"Certainly not. In theatrical parlance an angel is a man who puts up money to start a show on the road—a financial backer. See?"

"I dew."

"Well, I found an angel, an old fellow who got it into his head that I could play Juliet. I thought I could, too, but nobody else did, so after spending four weeks on the road and eight thousand dollars of the old man's money I gave it up. But I was nearer home then, and had nothing to growl about."

"Wa-al!" gasped Hiram, amazed at this expose of the inner workings of theatrical life.

The conversation continued for some time, and Hiram, as he expressed it to Oliver, "took quite a shine" to the actress.

In fact, the youth found himself quite cut out in a day or two, for Miss Fly monopolized most of the hayseed's time.

She enjoyed his society well enough, for he was liberal with his money.

Champagne, terrapin stew, drives in the park and opera boxes are not to be sneezed at by a variety actress out of a job.

Miss Fly did not sneeze at them.

"Mighty nice gal she is," remarked Hiram to Oliver on the afternoon of the third day after he had made the actress' acquaintance.

"Well, I guess she was—once," replied the youth, in disgusted accents.

"Hey?" snapped his employer.

"I say that at some time when the world was young she might have been extremely attractive. But if she were gathered unto her fathers now it might please the old gentlemen, and wouldn't hurt the community to any perceptible extent."

Oliver's incisive wit made the old hayseed mad.

"See here, Oliver," he snorted, "I don't want to hear no more talk like that. Ef yeou say anything more o' that kind I'll discharge yeou, b'gosh! an' yeou kin make yeour fifty cents a day sellin' papers."

As Oliver was by no means done with the hayseed, he replied meekly, as he pretended to wipe away a scalding tear:

"Very well, sir."

"I don't wanter be ha'sh with yeou," went on Hiram, softening a little, "fer I know yeou need the money. But I like that gal—I feel a kinder fatherly interest in her—an' I ain't goin' tew hev her abused."

"All right, Mr. Jay," sighed Oliver.

"I'm a-goin' tew take her tew the opery ter-night, tew," added the old man.

"You are?"

"Yes, I be. It's one of that there Mr. Wagner's pieces, tew. It's suthin' she wants tew see; I fergit the name o' the blamed thing—it's suthin' 'baout a tan-yard."

"Tannhauser," maybe."

"Yes, that's it."

"You will be sure to enjoy it."

"Wa-al, I dunno; I'd ruther seen Buff'lo Bill. But I'm a-goin', anyhow; an' I've got one o' them there private boxes."

"You have?"

"Yes; darn the expense! I've only got one life to live."

"That's so, Mr. Jay; but you'll have to go in full dress."

"In what?"

"Full dress."

"Wa-al, yeou didn't s'pose I was a-goin' tew go undressed, did yeou?"

"You do not appear to understand me, sir."

"Dunno's I dew."

"I will explain."

And he did.

"Waal, I'll be darned!" said Hiram, when he had finished. "So I've got tew wear one o' them there suits."

"You ought to. Why, you would just be too lovely for any use in evening dress, Mr. Jay."

"But I hain't got one."

"No, but you can hire one."

"Kin I?"

"Most assuredly."

"Haow much will they charge?"

"Oh, a couple of dollars."

Hiram groaned.

"Wa-al, ef I must, I must. Say, Oliver!"

"Sir?"

"Yeou know more 'baout them kind o' things than I do."

"Yes, sir."

"Yeou just run aout an' hire me a suit, will yeou?"

"Why, certainly, sir."

And he went.

In about an hour he returned, and the suit that he brought was a terror from Terrorville.

It was one that had been worn at about every east side dance that had occurred for the past fifteen years, and it was not only elderly and careworn, but it was a couple of sizes too small for the hayseed.

But he managed to squeeze it on somehow, and then prancing around in front of the mirror, he demanded of Oliver:

"Haow dew I look?"

"Oh, fine," responded the youth.

"The gum-swizzled thing seems tew small."

"Oh, no, it's just right. You know it's the proper caper to have your clothes as snug as you can bear them."

"'Tis, hey?"

"Oh, yes."

"Wa-al, ef this here suit was much snugger than 'tis I reckon 'twould bust. But I s'pose I've got tew stand it."

"Yes, sir; all gentlemen of fashion like you have to make some sacrifices for the sake of appearances."

"I s'pose so. Wa-al, I'm in fer it, an' I'll grin an' bear it; but I'm blamed ef this ain't the last time I'll try tew wear one o' these here full dress suits."

Oliver retired from the room with an admiring smile, while the old man peeled off the suit and laid it aside until evening.

At about half-past seven o'clock he and the actress started for the theatre.

They had not been gone five minutes when Oliver

who was preparing to follow them, was told that there was a lady in the parlor who wanted to see him.

Wondering who it could be, he went downstairs and found himself in the presence of an elderly woman attired in a black silk dress inflated with hoops, a bonnet of the time of Richard II., and a pair of lace mits.

"Young man," she began in a shrill voice, "is yeour name Sudden?"

"Yes'm," replied the youth meekly.

"Oliver Sudden?"

"Yes'm."

"Then I've business with yeou."

"What is it, ma'am?"

The old lady drew a quarter from her reticule and handed it to Oliver.

"Take this; an' mind yeou don't squander it. I want yeou tew dew suthin' fer me."

"I am your slave for life," replied the youth, depositing the coin in his vest pocket.

"Yeou're workin' fer a man named Hiram Jay, ain't yeou?"

"So my kind employer is entitled."

"Wa-al, he's my husband."

Oliver started and assumed a look of great astonishment.

"Is it possible that you are Mrs. Jay?"

"Wa-al, I ain't no one else."

"Marthy Ann?"

"That's my name."

"Oh, how often Mr. Jay has spoken of you."

"He has, hey?"

"Certainly."

"Wa-al, I've heerd some stories o' his goin's on in York, an' I thought I'd come daown an' see haow much trewth there was in 'em. Where is he naow?"

"He has gone out."

"Where?"

Oliver hesitated, and affected an air of great embarrassment.

"Do not, oh, do not ask me, madam."

"Wa-al, I will ask yeou," piped Marthy Ann. "I ain't come daown here fer nothin'. I'm a-goin' tew find aout what Hiram Jay is up tew, no matter ef it costs me four dollars. Naow, boy, yeou tell me where he is an' yeou won't lose nothin' by it."

"Must I?" almost sobbed Oliver.

"Wa-al, yeou must."

"Then, he's at the opera."

"The opery!" shrieked Marthy Ann.

"Yes,m."

"Wa-al, that does beat all!"

"Yes'm."

"Is he alone?"

"No, ma'am."

"Who's with him?"

"I—I don't like to tell," whimpered the youth, pretending to be dreadfully frightened.

"But yeou must!"

"Must I, ma'am?"

"Yes. Is it a woman?" shrieked Mrs. Jay.

"Yes'm."

"What's her name?"

"Miss Fly."

"Who—what is she?"

"An actress."

"A wha-at?" shrieked Mrs. Jay.

"An actress."

"One o' them wimmen that acts aout ontew the stage?"

"Yes'm."

"An' my husband, Hiram Jay, has gone tew a show with her?"

"Yes'm, they are in a box together at this moment."

"In a which?"

"A box."

"What kind of a box?"

"Well, not a soap box," responded Oliver; "just an ordinary opera box."

"Wa-al, I don't know what that is, but I'll haul him aout of it in purty short order, or my name ain't Marthy Ann Jay. Sech goin's on I never did hear on."

"Me, neither," added Oliver, with a look of deep sympathy.

"Boy!"

"Yes'm."

"I've never been inside a playhaouse in my life, but I wanter go tew this one tew-night."

"All right, Mrs. Jay."

And Oliver turned away to conceal a smile at the thought of the fun that was coming.

"Oliver!"

"Yes'm."

"I want yeou tew show me where the place is. Will yeou?"

"Yes'm. But I must ask one thing."

"What is it?"

"Please don't tell Mr. Jay that I told you where he was. I depend upon him for my daily bread, to say nothing of pie, and were I to lose his fifty cents a day I should be lost—lost!"

"Wa-al, I won't say nothin'. Naow yeou put on yeour hat an' come along."

"Yes'm."

"An' ef yeou git me there all right I'll give yeou ten cents more."

"Oh, how liberal you are, Mrs. Jay."

"Wa-al, there ain't nothin' mean 'baout Marthy Ann Jay, an' there never was."

"Oh, I can readily believe that. Excuse me a moment while I put on my overcoat."

"All right, boy."

Oliver slid out of the room and out of the front door.

He engaged a coupe, for he did not want to be seen with such a freak as Marthy Ann; Hiram was bad enough, and he felt that he had to draw the line somewhere.

Then he returned to the house and announced:

"I'm all ready, ma'am."

Marthy Ann stalked to the door.

"I'm jest achin' tew git my hands onter Hiram Jay an' that actin' woman."

"Yes'm, your sufferings must be intense. Aha! the chariot waits, and the prancing steed madly champs its bit. Step right in, ma'am."

And Oliver threw open the door of the coupe.

Mrs. Jay started back.

"What's this?"

"This" replied Oliver, "was intended for a carriage."

"But haow much does it cost?"

"Nothing."

"Nothin'?"

"No, ma'am. To every boarder who eats one hundred consecutive plates of hash without murmuring the landlady of this food mill gives the use of a coupe. I have accomplished the feat, and behold my reward."

"I wanter know."

"So do I. Step right in, and if you don't see what you want don't look at it. What, ho! there, driver!"

"Yes, boss?" responded the grinning cabman.

"Hie thee to the Metropolitan Opera House, and on thy life delay not, for any moment may be thy next."

And Oliver took his place beside Marthy Ann.

All the way to the opera house he entertained the old lady with stories of Hiram's exploits in New York.

By the time they reached the festive scene Mrs. Jay was in a white heat of rage.

Oliver bought two tickets, and the couple entered the opera house.

Every one who looked at the old lady grinned; and she fairly gasped for breath as the glories of the big auditorium burst upon her.

"Gracious goodness!"

"Yes'm," smiled Oliver.

"Wa-al, I never!"

"Neither did I."

"This beats all! What a big room, an' what a paower o' people!"

"Yes'm."

"But where's Hiram?"

"There he is."

And Oliver pointed to the box where the festive hayseed was engaged in an animated conversation with Miss Fly.

Marthy Ann's eyes fairly blazed as she gazed upon the couple.

"I'll teach him!" she hissed.

"Yes," returned Oliver meekly.

"Haow kin I git up there?"

"I will conduct you, Mrs. Jay."

"Wa-al, go ahead."

"But remember one thing, madam."

"What's that?"

"Don't say I brought you here. Recollect that I am only a poor, lowly little boy with no visible means of support except my feet, and that should I lose my job I should be without employment."

"I won't say nothin', Oliver."

"Oh, bless you for those words! And now follow me. Be cautious, for Mr. Jay is a desperate man, and is armed to the eyebrows."

"Wa-al, I calc'late I ain't much skeered o' him. Go ahead."

Oliver went ahead.

He opened the door of the box for Mrs. Jay, and then skipped around to a spot where he could see the fun.

And there was fun.

"Hiram Jay!" shrieked the old lady, in a tone that was heard above the orchestra, the prima donna, and even the swells in the boxes.

The hayseed leaped to his feet.

"I'll be gum-swizzled!" he gasped.

"Who is this woman?" demanded Miss Fly, haughtily.

"Who is she?" screamed Marthy Ann. "I'll show you who she is!"

And she did.

The way she went for the actress was a caution to hyenas.

Off came Miss Fly's bonnet, then her wig, then other portions of her elaborate make-up; and if she had not managed to escape through the box door, it is extremely probable that in a very short time there would have been nothing left of her but a smell of Jockey Club.

When she was gone Marthy Ann started in to annihilate Hiram.

But he, too, made a break for the door.

The old lady chased him through the opera house

amid howls of laughter, and the pair finally disappeared in the lobby.

When Oliver followed them they had vanished; he could not find them anywhere.

He began to think that he had seen the last of Hiram; but he had not, as it will be our duty to relate in our next.

CHAPTER II

HIRAM AS AN INVALID.

Neither Hiram nor his energetic and more or less fascinating spouse returned to Mrs. Hashton's grub laboratory on the night of the harrowing events detailed in our last symphony.

Oliver, as we stated, came to the conclusion that the old man had been shipped back to South Dusenbury, and was about making preparations to leave the boarding-house and look for fun somewhere else, when the door of his room opened and in stalked the hayseed.

He was a fine-looking spectacle.

He looked as if he had been engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with a whole menagerie of wild beasts, and as if they had had lots of fun with him.

His face was cratched so that it looked like a map of Peru. A piece was chewed off one of his ears, there was a large vacant space on his head which formerly had been covered with a glossy curl, and one of his eyes was in mourning.

His appearance was not pretty, but it was highly pathetic.

Yet Oliver, we are pained to state, indulged in a six and a half by nine and seven-eighths smile as his eyes rested upon the old man.

Hiram did not see it, however—the youth took good care that he should not.

Striking an attitude, the bold, bad youth exclaimed:

"Oh, do not say it is you, Mr. Jay!"

"Wa-al, I'm gum-swizzled ef I know whether 'tis or not," drawled Hiram, mournfully.

"I feared that you had passed away. Oh, is this a dream?"

"No, darn it, it's a nightmare."

"And you still live, sir?"

"Wa-al, I dunno whether I dew or not; guess I'll hev tew leave that tew yeou."

"What has happened, sir? Miss Fly returned alone at a late hour last night, and I have been unable to secure an interview with her to learn what had become of you. I am informed that she is seriously indisposed this morning."

"Wa-al, I don't wonder."

"What happened last night, sir?"

"Naow, don't yeou know, Oliver?"

"How should I know, sir?" asked the youth in seeming surprise.

"Didn't yeou send her tew the opery haouse?"

"Send who?"

"Marthy Ann."

"Mrs. Jay? Good gracious, sir, was she there?"

"Was she? Wa-al, I reckon she was. An' yeou didn't send her?"

"Why, how could I, sir?"

"Wa-al, I didn't s'pose yeou could; but I'm gum-swizzled ef I know haow she got there."

"What did she do, Mr. Jay?"

"Dew? Wa-al she bust up the hull show fer one thing."

"Broke up a performance of Wagner opera?"

"Yes, she did. Oh, Marthy Ann has got an awful lot of energy."

"So I should imagine from what you have said, sir."

"She pretty near scalped Miss Fly, an' then she went fer me."

"Gracious, Mr. Jay! What did you do?"

"I jest streaked it."

"Did she overtake you?"

"Don't I look as ef she did?" demanded Hiram.

"Well, you do," admitted Oliver.

"Yes," continued the old man, as he sadly surveyed himself in the mantel glass, "she overtook me, an' had lots o' fun with me. You see, I ran intew a lick store, thinkin' she wouldn't foller me there."

"I see."

"But she did, an' by jingo when she got her hands intew my hair she made me yell. The folks in the saloon laffed fit tew split, an' bimeby the boss came aout from behind his caounter an' separated us. Ef he hadn't I dunno's I'd be livin' naow."

"Well, you escaped death, anyhow. But why didn't you come back here? I spent a long, tearful night, every hour of which seemed sixty minutes, waiting and watching for you."

"I couldn't come back."

"Why?"

"Marthy Ann wouldn't let me. She said she wouldn't sleep under the roof with that there Miss Fly."

"And where did she sleep?"

"She made me take her tew a hotel; an' we had tew go tew five places afore they'd take us in, on accaount of the way I looked."

"Well, I don't blame them."

"Oh, I looked a blamed sight wuss then than I dew naow."

"I suppose Mrs. Jay is at the hotel now?"

"No, she ain't; she's gone back to Saouth Dusenbury," replied Hiram, gleefully.

"Indeed, sir? How is that?"

"Oh, I managed that, Oliver. Fust she wouldn't hear tew nothin' but that I must go hum with her."

"Naturally."

"But I told her I was transactin' some business here that 'twouldn't dew tew leave, an' I fin'ly persuaded her tew go hum an' leave me."

"You did well, Mr. Jay."

"Wa-al, I think I did, fer Marthy Ann ain't no easy woman tew manage."

"I should imagine not."

"An' yeou imagine jest right. I was surprised when I seen her go off without me."

"You must have been. Well, she may be back again."

"Oh, she will. She told me that she'd 'low me jest one week tew finish up my business in, an' ef I wa'n't back in Saouth Dusenbury by that time she'd come daown arter me."

"Indeed! Then you will have to go home in a week?"

"Wa-al, mebbe."

"Of course you will."

Hiram smiled shrewdly.

"I shall, unless I change my boardin'-haouse."

"A great idea, Mr. Jay."

"Oh, Hiram Jay ain't no fule."

"No, indeed, sir."

"When the week that I've paid fer in advance is up

here we'll find another place; an' I sha'n't let Marthy Ann know nothin' 'baout it neither."

"But I thought all along that you wanted to go back to South Dusenbury, Mr. Jay."

"Wa-al, I did, kinder; but the sight o' Marthy Ann kinder changed my mind. I calc'late I'll stay here till my money runs a little lower."

"That's right, sir; but I should think you would want to be boss of your own household."

"Wa-al, I dew wanter be, but that hain't got nothin' tew dew with it. Yeou wait till yeou marry a woman like Marthy Ann some day, an' yeou'll know a darned sight more'n yeou dew naow."

"I suppose so, Mr. Jay. But may I make a suggestion?"

"Wa-al, go ahead."

"You ought to apologize to Miss Fly."

"Me?"

"Certainly."

"What fer?"

"Why, for the embarrassing position in which you placed her."

"'Twa'n't my fault."

"It was indirectly, and I think you ought to apologize."

"What'll I say?"

"Well, I should advise you to present her with an elegant bouquet, accompanied by a few graceful remarks, such as you can make so well."

The hayseed smirked.

"Guess that ain't a bad idee, Oliver."

"I thought you would agree with me, Mr. Jay."

"But say, Oliver!"

"Sir?"

"Haow kin I go an' talk tew her lookin' the way I dew?"

"I'll tell you what to do, sir."

"Wa-al?"

"You take an hour to fix yourself up. While you are about it I'll go out and get the bouquet for you."

"All right, Oliver, I'll dew it. Guess that'll make me all solid with her ag'in."

"Why, of course it will."

And the youth hurried out.

He had a trick ready to spring on the old man that was a chestnut, but he felt sure that Hiram had never heard of it.

Before he went out he managed to get an interview with the actress, who had pretty well repaired damages.

"Mr. Jay is very anxious to see you and explain about that unfortunate occurrence of last evening," he said.

"I don't want any explanation, and I won't see him, so there!" snapped the actress.

"Oh, you'd better."

"I won't!"

"He's going to give you a magnificent bouquet."

"He is?"

"Yes; it'll be a dandy."

"Well," hesitated Miss Fly, "I suppose I may as well scoop it in."

"Why, of course."

"Well, tell him I'll see him."

"All right, Miss Fly. I'll bring him down to the parlor in an hour."

Then the youth slid out and got the bouquet.

It was a dandy.

It was very fair to look upon, but its true inwardness was not apparent to the sight.

When Oliver got back to the boarding-house with it

he found the hayseed had managed to considerably improve his appearance.

"Guess I'll dew," he said.

"I have seldom seen you looking more lovely," returned the jokist, promptly.

"Wa-al, where is Miss Fly?"

"She's down in the parlor."

"I'll go right daown."

"Can't I go, too?"

"Yeou? Course yeou can't. Gimme that bucket, an' yeou stay right up here."

"All right, sir."

And Oliver handed over the bouquet with a deep sigh of regret.

But you may be pretty sure he followed the old man down, and was standing outside the parlor door when he was greeted by the actress.

"Oh, Mr. Jay!"

"Haow d' dew, Miss Fly? I'm darned sorry fer what happened last night—gum-swizzled ef I ben't."

"Well, I suppose you could not help it, Mr. Jay."

"Blamed ef I could."

"Who was that awful woman?"

"Oh, she was a woman that—that got kinder stuck ontew me," stammered Hiram, "an' she got kinder jealous seein' me with yeou."

"Dear—dear."

"But don't let's talk 'baout her. Here's a bucket o' flaowers I brought fer yeou."

"Oh, how lovely they are!" gushed Miss Fly, seizing the bouquet. "You are so kind, Mr. Jay."

"Wa-al, b'gosh," said the gratified hayseed, "I'd do more'n that fer yeou. Why, Miss Fly, I——"

He was interrupted by a loud explosion, and the bouquet flew into a thousand pieces.

In the center of it Oliver had caused to be placed an explosive, arranged so that it would go off at a certain time; it was a trick that he had played before with immense success.

Miss Fly yelled like a Comanche, Hiram shouted "I'll be gum-swizzled!" and Oliver doubled up with laughter on the other side of the door.

"Darn it all," shouted the hayseed, as he gazed at the wreck of the bouquet, "I'd like to know the meanin' o' this."

"You know well enough!" shrieked Miss Fly, in a rage. "It is a trick, an infamous trick, and——"

"I'll be gum——" began Hiram, when Oliver, drawing on a straight face, entered the room.

"What was that terrific explosion?" he asked with an air of deep concern. "Is any one injured?"

"Why, the darned bucket busted," replied Hiram. "Say, Oliver," he added with sudden suspicion, "this ain't no trick o' yourn, is it?"

"Oh, Mr. Jay," exclaimed the youth, "can you think me capable of such an act? Aha! I see it all."

"What dew yeou mean?"

"The florist must have put in one or two of the celebrated South American explosive flowers."

"What's them?"

"Why, they are a flower which when it reaches a certain period of its existence explodes with a loud report."

"Wa-al, I'll be gum-swizzled!"

"South American nothing!" interrupted Miss Fly, scornfully, as she flouted out of the room. "I'm not quite big enough fool to believe that story. I want nothing more to do with either of you."

Hiram and Oliver stared at each other, the hayseed

all broken up and his companion with a deeply pained look on his face.

"Say, Oliver, this wa'n't no trick o' yourn, naow, was it?" demanded the old man.

"Of course not, sir."

"There is a pretty strong smell o' gunpaowder in the room."

"Yes, but the South American explosive flower is also known as the gunpowder plant on account of that peculiar odor."

"Is that so?"

"Certainly."

"Wa-al, I'll hev tew take yeour word fer it. Darned ef I keer whether Miss Fly's mad or not."

"I wouldn't if I were you."

"I'm blamed sick o' this boardin'-haouse tew, an' I'm gum-swizzled ef I think I kin stay aout the week. Besides, Marthy Ann might take it intew her head to come back afore the time's up."

"True, sir."

"Guess I'll make a change right off, an' forfeit the money."

"All right, Mr. Jay."

"Dew yeou know of any other good boardin'-haouse?"

"I think I do," replied Oliver, who had been preparing for this.

"Where is it?"

"About half a mile from here, on the east side."

"Who keeps it?"

"One Dr. Pepsin."

"'Nother man's boardin'-haouse, hey? Dunno's I like that. Is he anything like that there Major Biff?"

"Oh, no; entirely different."

"Wa-al, the differenter he is the better I'll like him."

"But he has one peculiarity."

"What is it? Darn it all, I'd like tew git intew a boardin'-haouse where the folks hain't got no peculiarities."

"Oh, well, you won't mind Dr. Pepsin's. Being a doctor, he is deeply interested in the health of his patients, and won't accept any boarders without knowing all about the state of their constitution and all that sort of thing."

"I dunno's I'd mind that."

"Oh, it's a positive advantage."

"Wa-al, I'm a-goin' tew lay daown a little while, an' when I git up we'll go an' see this here doctor."

"All right, sir."

While the old man was "layin' daown," Oliver ran out and had a brief interview with the doctor himself.

Dr. Pepsin, with whom the youth was well acquainted, was a quack physician, who ran what he called a "Sanitarium" on a small scale not far from Third avenue.

He was, as Oliver knew, "N. G.," and would board patients for almost anything, most of his victims being composed of that large class of people who have nothing whatever the matter with them, but who imagine themselves dangerously ill.

The less they paid the less they got to eat; and, as all meals were served in their rooms, no one of the patients knew what the others got.

So Oliver went and told the alleged doctor that he had a patient who wished to avail himself of his advice, but who could not afford to pay a fancy price.

"Send him along, my boy," said the doctor, rubbing his hands in glee at the thought of a new patient. "Dr. Bolingbroke Pepsin never refuses to aid an invalid because he is poor."

"Very well, doctor. By the way, I shall be with him as attendant, but please don't tell him that I've been here first."

"Very good; I shall remember."

Half an hour later Oliver and Hiram entered the doctor's shabby office.

"I came araound tew see 'baout gittin' board here," the hayseed announced.

"Indeed, sir? I am pleased to see you. What seems to be the matter with you?"

"I dunno's there's much the matter with me 'cept that I'm hungry 'baout all the time."

Dr. Pepsin shook his head gravely.

"A dangerous symptom, sir, in many cases."

"I wanter know!"

"Certainly it is. The appetite for food should be sternly repressed, or serious results may follow."

"Dew tell!"

"Yes, sir. In nearly every case it is advisable to leave the table hungry."

"Sir, I will not disguise from you the fact that you are a very sick man," he said when he had finished.

"I wanter know! Wa-al, I hain't been feelin' well lately."

"I should say not. Both your lungs and your liver are seriously affected."

"Haow yeou talk!"

"It is fortunate for you that you came here."

"Wa-al! What kin be done, doctor?"

"I will undertake your cure."

"Haow much will it cost me?"

The doctor looked thoughtful.

"I shall make it very low for you. For board and medical attendance I shall charge you ten dollars per week only."

"Can't pay no sech figger," said Hiram promptly.

"What, sir, would you rather die than pay this paltry sum?"

"Might jest as well die as spend all my money."

"Well, well, we will make it eight dollars."



HE WAS INTERRUPTED BY A LOUD EXPLOSION, AND THE BOUQUET FLEW INTO A THOUSAND PIECES. IN THE CENTER OLIVER HAD CAUSED TO BE PLACED A CERTAIN EXPLOSIVE.

"Wa-al, then, I guess I must hev struck a purty healthy boardin-haouse where I be, an' I dunno's there's any se o' changin'."

"Well, sir, as my time is valuable, suppose I make an examination of your lungs and other internal organs at once?"

"I dunno's as I need any examination."

"Oh, yes, you do. I can see symptoms of disease already."

"Sho!"

"Yes, sir"—and the doctor produced a dangerous-looking machine. "I shall now proceed to test your lungs."

Well, for about half an hour he worked away at the hayseed, looking at his tongue, feeling his pulse, banging away at his lungs, sticking machines of various kinds down his throat, and all the time uttering remarks about his physical condition, until Hiram was about half-scared to death—which was just the effect the doctor had been working to produce.

But Hiram would not agree to this either, and they finally compromised on six dollars.

At dinner time a servant came up with a plate of graham crackers and a pitcher of water.

"Your dinner, sir."

"What, that?" gasped the hayseed. "Take it away an' bring me a plate o' steak."

"The doctor says you must eat nothing but these crackers if you expect to recover."

Well, poor Hiram worried the crackers down, but it was a hard job.

He had the same bill for breakfast, dinner and supper the next day, and the next, and then he weakened.

Going down to the doctor's office, he said:

"I've got 'nough o' that kind o' fodder. Ef I wa'n't sick when I came here, eatin' dry crackers and swillin' daown water 'ud make me so, an' they hev, 'baout. I'm a-goin' tew quit."

"Very well, sir, very well, but you take your life in your hands."

"I'd rather take it in my own hands than leave it in yourn."

"You insult me, Mr. Jay. Here, sir, is your bill."

"What's this?" howled the hayseed, as he gazed at the document. "Thirty-one dollars!"

"Yes, sir—six for board, and twenty-five for my examination the day you came here."

"I won't pay it—it's a swindle!"

"How dare you, sir? You will pay it, or you will not leave this house."

"Who'll prevent me?"

"I will."

And the doctor placed himself in the doorway.

He had frightened many a patient in this manner, but Hiram didn't scare worth a cent.

One of his long arms revolved like a wind-mill, and came down on the physician's head.

Dr. Pepsin defended himself like a man, while one of his servants rushed out for a policeman.

The end of it all was that Hiram received another severe punishment, and was hauled off to answer a charge of assault and battery.

CHAPTER III.

HIRAM BECOMES A SPECULATOR.

After his experience at the Sanitarium Hiram was madder than ever, and avowed once more his unalterable determination to go back to "Saouth Dusenbury."

"Walnuts!" ejaculated Oliver.

"No, 'tain't no walnut."

"Chestnuts, then," laughed the youth.

"No, 'tain't."

"Yes, it is."

"I'll be gum-swizzled ef I don't go."

"Then you'll be gum-swizzled sure. Say, Mr. Jay, how does a man look after he's been gum-swizzled, anyhow?"

"Yeou shet up, Oliver."

"What sort of a process is it?"

"Quit yeour jokin'. I'm a-goin' hum, an' I want yeou tew help me pack up my things."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Jay."

"'Tain't, neither. Oh, I'm a-goin' this time, sure's yeou're born."

"Think of Marthy Ann," said Oliver, warningly.

Hiram's jaw fell.

But he said resolutely:

"I don't keer, I'm a-goin'."

"Think of the reception you'll get."

No reply.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Jay—honest, I am."

Hiram sighed and began to look dubious.

"And think of the chances for fun you're throwing away."

"I ain't, neither."

"Why, yes, you are."

"Hain't had nothin' but bad luck sence I've been tew York."

"That's just the reason you ought to stay."

Hiram stared at the youth.

"Haow dew yeou make that aout?"

"Because the luck's been bad so long it's sure to turn."

"I dunno."

"I do, sir. You're going away just as the fun's beginning."

"I hain't seen none of it."

"But you will."

"I guess not. Besides, my money's givin' aout."

"Ah," cried Oliver, enthusiastically, "that's just the point!"

"Hey?"

"What place in the world is there where money can be made any quicker than in New York?"

"That's so, Oliver."

"Of course it's so."

"But I hain't got no chance tew make none."

"Why haven't you?"

"'Cause I don't know nothin' 'baout no business. Farmin's what I've allers been used tew."

"But any one can speculate, Mr. Jay."

"Dunno 'baout that."

"I do. I've seen many a greenhorn go down to Wall street and learn all about it in one day."

"Dew tell."

"Besides, you have the head of a great speculator. You know how often your extraordinary resemblance to Jay Gould has been commented upon."

"Darned ef it hain't," giggled Hiram.

"That massive brow, that sunny, yet diplomatic smile, that affable, yet stern manner, all stamp you as a diplomatist of the first water."

"Haow yeou talk, Oliver."

"Well, I haven't said half I think, Mr. Jay."

"I wanter know."

"All you want is a chance and you will become a great money king."

By this time Hiram began to be a good deal "stuck" on himself.

"Dunno but yeou're 'baout right, Oliver."

"Most assuredly I am."

"I allers was paowerful cute in drivin' a barg'in."

"I can readily imagine so."

"I swapped off an old bay hoss with the blind staggers onct fer a caow. The feller thought he'd got a big barg'in, but when the hoss died the next day he came back for the caow. Didn't git her, though. Oh, I could tell yeou lots o' trades o' that kind that I've made, Oliver."

"I don't doubt it, sir. Well, why don't you try your skill as a financier in New York?"

"Dunno but I will, but I hain't got much money tew lose."

"Lose! You lose, Mr. Jay! Why, you make me laugh; the idea is absurd, —"

"Dunno but 'tis. But people dew lose sometimes."

"Not shrewd, far-seeing financiers like you. Why, I prophesy that after you have been in Wall street a month or so Jay Gould will be begging you for points."

"Wa-al, mebbe I'll try it."

"Certainly you will, sir."

"Anyhaow, I'll stay in York a few days longer."

"That's the talk, Mr. Jay."

"And naow fer a new boardin'-haouse. Where'll we go?"

They discussed this matter for some time, and finally a cheap hotel on the Bowery was decided upon.

As the reader has guessed, all Oliver's talk about speculation had a purpose.

He had a "new job" all ready to put up on the unfortunate bucolic.

As soon as they had secured accommodations in the hotel Hiram went to bed.

"I'm all tuckered aout," he announced, "an' I'm a-goin' tew lay here till I git rested."

And he did "lay" nearly twenty-four hours.

At the end of that time he emerged, evidently much refreshed, and ate a "square" meal—such a meal as only a Bowery restaurant can furnish, lots of it and very cheap.

As Hiram was not particular as to quality he was satisfied, and pronounced the table the best he had found in New York.

He stated that he felt like a new man, and he had need to, for a severe trial was ahead of him.

Oliver had laid his plans for quite an extensive racket this time.

"Suppose we go and sit in the hotel office a little while and gaze at the madding crowd as they flit by?" suggested the youth.

"Don't keer ef I do," returned Hiram, picking large hunks of debris from his teeth.

So they seated themselves in one of the windows and began an interesting survey of the passing throng.

But scarcely had they taken their places when a rather genteel-looking man approached Hiram, and touching him upon the shoulder, said:

"Mr. Jay, I believe?"

"That's my name, mister."

"Can I have a few words in private with you?"

"What fer?"

"On a private business matter."

Oliver arose.

"I'll go into the reading-room while you talk, Mr. Jay."

And he strolled off.

"Now then, sir," said the stranger, "I have an extraordinary speculation to propose to you."

At the word "speculation" Hiram became interested.

"But haow did yeou know my name?" he asked.

"I saw it on the register, and at once decided to address you. I am acquainted in South Dusenbury and know you well by reputation."

"I wanter know."

"I am told by every one that you are a shrewd man of the world and a daring speculator."

"That's me."

"So I can see at a glance. Well, Mr. Jay, I am about to suggest to you one of the greatest speculations of the present age."

"Haow yeou talk!"

"Do you know what I mean by green goods?" inquired the stranger, lowering his voice.

"I s'pose yeou mean cabbages an' spinach, an' sich," replied the guileless Hiram.

"No, sir, I do not—far from it."

"Wa-al, what dew yeou mean?"

"I mean greenbacks, sir."

"Money?"

"Yes."

"Darned ef I understand yeou."

"I will explain. I am dealing in a million two-dollar bill which will defy de-

"Caounterfeit money!" exclaimed his eyes lighting up.

"Hush! not so loud. These bills are equal to the genuine. Imagine the business you could do with them in South Dusenbury, my dear sir. No one would ever know the difference."

"That's so, b'gosh!"

"Do you want to enter into the speculation, Mr. Jay?"

"I dunno but what I dew. Haow much dew yeou want fer yeour money?"

"I will sell you one thousand dollars for one hundred."

Hiram gasped for breath.

Such a chance for a fortune had never before been offered him, and probably never would be again.

"Gum-swizzled ef I don't dew it!" he exclaimed.

"Your decision is such as was to have been expected from a man of your rare discernment. Now if you will go to my room with me I will show you samples and deliver the goods."

Hiram thumped upstairs after the stranger, his heart beating like a trip-hammer as he thought of the money he was going to make.

Talk about Jay Gould!

Why, in a few months he would be able to buy him out!

When the stranger's room was reached the sample was displayed.

Hiram was perfectly satisfied with it—and he ought to have been, for it was a genuine bill.

In a few minutes one hundred dollars of his hard-earned money was in the pocket of Mr. Queerly—this, the stranger said, was his name—and Hiram was the happy possessor of a large square bundle, supposed to contain one thousand dollars in counterfeit two-dollar bills.

"Don't open it until you get back to South Dusenbury," cautioned Mr. Queerly.

"All right."

"And whenever you want more come down and see me—you'll always find me in this house."

"I'll dew it."

Hiram hurried back to his room, half-tickled to death. He found Oliver awaiting him.

"Your business took you an awful long time, Mr. Jay," he complained. "I got tired of waiting in the reading-room. What have you got in that bundle, sir?"

He need not have asked, for "Mr. Queerly" was only a pard of his in disguise, and the whole scheme had been arranged between them.

Hiram was so pleased with his great speculation that he could not keep the secret from Oliver.

"Guess yeour eyes'd open purty darned wide ef yeou knew what I'd been a-buyin', Oliver."

"What is it, sir?" asked Oliver, with feigned curiosity.

"Wa-al, it's money, that's what it is."

"Money?"

"Yes, money, an' don't yeou fergit it."

And Hiram went on to tell his young companion all about his recent transaction.

Oliver, though bursting with laughter, looked very serious.

"Why, Mr. Jay!"

"What's the matter, Oliver?"

"Do you think that's right?"

"Wa-al," said the hayseed, looking rather sheepish, "tain't no wuss for me than for hundreds of others."

"But I always understood you to say that you were a pillar of the church."

"So I be."

"Then doesn't your conscience reproach you?"

Hiram began to get angry.

"See here, Oliver, I don't like this here kind o' talk from yeou. I'm a-goin' tew give some o' this here money tew the foreign missions."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes, I be."

"And I suppose that'll fix your conscience all right?"

"Naow see here, young man——"

The hayseed did not finish the sentence, for just at that moment there came a tremendous knock upon the door.

Hiram jumped up and turned very pale.

"Who's there?"

"Open in the name of the law!"

Then, as the door was not locked anyway, the speaker threw it open and stalked in.

He was a short, stout individual with a heavy black beard, a big brass badge, and an official air.

But we may state right here that he was only one of Oliver's fellow-conspirators in disguise.

"Which of you two is Hiram Jay?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"It's—it's him," faltered Hiram, pointing to Oliver.

"Do not falsify me, sir," thundered the newcomer.

"I am Detective Ketchum, and I am not to be deceived

arrest unless you offer resistance; in that case you will find that Detective Ketchum is a desperate man and armed to the teeth."

Hiram followed the alleged minion of the law to the door.

"Oh, please let me go," whined Oliver. "I cannot be separated from Mr. Jay."

"I cannot be deaf to the appeal of this noble boy, whom you, Hiram Jay, would have sacrificed," returned Mr. Ketchum. "My lad, you shall go with us to the Tombs."

"Is that where yeou're a-goin' tew take me?"

"It is."

And the detective pranced out, followed by the wretched Hiram, with Oliver—who pretended to be weeping bitterly—bringing up the rear.

Ten or fifteen minutes' walk brought the party to a tall brownstone building on an East Side street.

It was a vacant house belonging to the father of one of Oliver's pals, who had succeeded in getting hold of



THE DOOR WAS INSTANTLY OPENED, AND THE TRIO WERE USHERED INTO AN APARTMENT, WHERE A STERN-LOOKING MAN WITH BUSHY WHISKERS SAT BEHIND A DESK.

by any such paltry subterfuge as this. You are Hiram Jay."

"Wa-al, s'posin' I be," said the old man, trying to pull himself together. "what of it?"

"What of it, sir? a good deal of it. Hiram Jay, you are my prisoner."

"W-what for?"

"For purchasing counterfeit money with the intention of circulating the same. Aha! here is proof of your crime."

And the alleged detective seized the bundle that Hiram had purchased from Mr. Queerly.

"That's my property," remonstrated the hayseed feebly.

"No, sir; it is mine now. Now, then, Mr. Jay, will you come along with me quietly, or shall I be forced to use handcuffs and an ax?"

"I'll go quietly, but I ain't guilty," wailed Hiram.

"That you can try to prove to the judge. And now come with me. No one need know that you are under

the key of it; and the boys had fitted it up as an impromptu prison for the luckless Hiram.

"Is this the Tombs?" asked the hayseed, as his companions paused.

"It is, sir."

And the detective rang the bell.

The door was instantly opened, and the trio were ushered into an apartment, where a stern-looking man with bushy whiskers sat behind a desk.

"Whom have we here?" demanded this individual.

"It is a circulator of counterfeit money, captain," replied Detective Ketchum.

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated the "captain." "This offense is becoming far too common of late, and an example must be made. What is your name, my man?"

"Hiram Jay," replied the wretched hayseed; "but——"

"Silence!—no remarks, or you will be heavily fined. Where do you hail from?"

"Saouth Dusenbury, an' I——"

"Silence! Search the prisoner, officer."

Another of the half dozen conspirators came forward and turned all of Hiram's pockets inside out, revealing a package of five-cent tobacco, a story paper, a piece of string, a picture of Marthy Ann, a photograph of a popular actress, a bunch of keys, a paper of peppermint lozenges, a couple of old letters, a cent's worth of gum, a care-worn looking handkerchief, and a roll of bills.

"Evidently a desperate character," said the captain; "everything points to that conclusion. Now let the bundle that was found in his room be opened."

This was done in an adjoining room, and the "officer" presently came back, saying:

"It was chuck full of counterfeit two-dollar bills, captain."

"As I thought. If I mistake not it will go hard with this man."

Here Hiram tried to get a word in.

"Squire, ef——"

"Silence!"

"Ef yeou'll let me 'xplain——"

"But I won't."

"W-why not?"

"It is the judge's business to listen to your explanations, not mine. Officer Casey!"

"Yes, sir."

And one of the jokists stepped forward.

"Take this man to cell 199."

"Yes, sir."

"Watch him closely, for he is a desperate character, and, if I mistake not, an old offender."

"All right, captain."

"If he offers any resistance shoot him down like a dog."

"I will, captain."

"Can't I go to his cell with him?" asked Oliver, who had been pretending to weep all this time.

"You can, boy, but only for a few moments."

"Come on now."

And the "officer" laid his hand upon Hiram's shoulder.

The unfortunate hayseed was led down to the cellar and conducted to an empty coal-bin.

"Great gosh!" he gasped, "hev I got tew sleep here?"

"You have."

"But what on?"

"On the floor, of course. You don't suppose we furnish our lodgers with spring beds, do you?"

"But this is more like a grave than a jail."

"That's why they call it the Tombs."

"Can't I hev nothin' tew eat?"

"Bread and water will be served you at six o'clock."

"I'll be gum-swizzled!"

"At eight in the morning you will have a breakfast of the same wholesome kind, and soon after that you'll be tried. I guess you'll get about fifty years."

Here Oliver got in a lot of fine work. He hung on to the hayseed's neck, pretended to have the hysterics, declared that he would never leave the prisoner, and finally had to be dragged away by the officer.

spite of anything Oliver or anybody else kin say—darned ef I don't."

His jailer had left his lantern, and the crestfallen hayseed ruefully surveyed his surroundings.

"But I'll never git aout," he murmured, "unless it's tew go to a prison that may be a blamed sight wuss'n this. An' jest as I thought I'd made my everlastin' fortin'! This here thing couldn't ha' happened tew no other man but me, b'gosh! An' not even a bed tew sleep ontew! Gum-swizzled ef the darned place don't look more like a coal-bin than anything else."

Here he fancied that he heard a stifled burst of laughter outside his door.

He listened, but the sound was not repeated, and he concluded that he had been mistaken.

But he had not, for Oliver and several of the others were outside the door listening to his meditations.

After a while they got tired, and after rattling a lot of old chains in an ominous way they went upstairs to talk the matter over.

"It's kind of tough on the old man," said one of the bcys. "Don't you think we'd better let him out pretty soon?"

"Let him out!" exclaimed Oliver, indignantly. "Not before morning."

"You mean to keep him there all night?"

"Why, certainly."

"Of course," chorused the other fellows.

"But suppose he should die," suggested the tender-hearted one, apprehensively.

"He die!" sneered Oliver. "Hiram Jay die! There's no danger. Why, it would be a hard day's work for a strong man to kill him."

"He must be pretty tough."

"He is that. Oh, don't you worry about him—he'll come out all right. In the morning we'll have lots more fun with him, too, at his trial."

In this heartless manner was the hayseed disposed of.

After spending some time in arranging all the details of the great trial the boys separated; and it is safe to say that most of them got but little sleep that night in anticipation of the fun they were going to have the next day.

When, at eight o'clock in the morning, one of the boys, in the character of a jailer, took Hiram a hunk of dry bread and a glass of water, he found him a badly damaged hayseed.

The old man had been asleep upon the floor, and was covered from head to foot with coal dust.

The jailer shook his head.

"This will never do."

"What won't do?" wailed Hiram.

"Your appearance. The judge is very particular about the looks of prisoners that are brought before him."

"Wa-al, haow kin I help it?" moaned the hayseed. "Didn't I hev tew sleep on a pile o' coal dust?"

"You should have slept standing up."

"Standin' up!"

"Yes, sir. Many of our prisoners do it rather than offend the judge."

"Wa-al, I'll be gum-swizzled! An' is that my breakfast?"

"Yes, sir, it is. Have you got anything to say against it?"

"Wa-al, I can't say much in its favor, b'gosh!"

And Hiram picked up the hunk of bread and began chewing on it.

But he had to give up in despair in a few moments,

CHAPTER IV.

HIRAM'S "TRIAL."

"Ef I ain't the unluckiest man that ever drew breath then I'll be gum-swizzled!" moaned Hiram, as he waltzed up and down his narrow cell. "Ef I ever git aout o' this I will go back tew Saouth Dusenbury in

for the bread was as hard as a rock, and his teeth were not calculated for that kind of work.

"I'll be gum-swizzled ef this ain't 'baout the wust I ever struck," he sighed.

"Be careful what you say," the jailer warned him, "for I am obliged to repeat every word you utter to the judge."

"Yeou be?"

"Yes, sir; and nothing enrages him more than to hear that one of the prisoners has been complaining of the food."

"Why don't he give 'em somethin' decent tew eat, then?" groaned Hiram.

"Say, what do you take this place for, anyway?" was the response—"the Fifth Avenue Hotel or the Tombs?"

"I'll be gum-swizzled!" moaned the hayseed.

Then he asked:

"Can't yeou git me a whisk broom?"

"What for?"

"Tew brush my close with, of course. Ef the judge is so darned pertickler I might ez well slick up a leetle mite."

"Well, you can't have a whisk broom."

"Why not?"

"It's against the rules. You might commit suicide."

"Commit suicide with a whisk broom!" exclaimed Hiram.

"Certainly. Why, one of our prisoners stabbed himself with a broom splint only about a month ago."

"Wa-al, I'll be darned!"

"But I can't stand here talking with you any longer. Your trial will take place at ten o'clock precisely. I'm sorry for you, for I fear that it will go hard with you."

With these cheering words the alleged jailer wandered out, leaving poor Hiram in a very unenviable state of mind.

"Wa-al, I'll be gum-swizzled," he muttered, as he sank down upon the floor in utter dejection, "ef this ain't 'baout the wust yet! I don't s'pose that ther jedger'll hev any mercy on me. Oh, what'll Marthy Ann say when she hears this? She allers did say I'd end up some sich way, an' I'm darned ef she wa'n't right arter all."

Just then the door opened again and in stalked a tall, slim, professional-looking individual, who, as Hiram struggled to his feet, said:

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear Mr. Jay; remain seated if you feel more comfortable that way."

"I don't feel comfortable no way," sighed the hayseed. "Who be yeou—the jedger?"

"No, my dear sir, I am not. My name is Blackstone Bluffer and I am a lawyer."

"Yeou be, hey?"

"Yes, sir, and I am here to offer you my services as counsel in your coming trial."

"Wa-al," soliloquized Hiram, "I s'pose I dew need a lawyer. I hadn't thought o' that."

"But I had, sir. As soon as I heard of your case I said to myself: 'Blackstone, my boy, there is a man who, if you do not consent to aid him, will inevitably be condemned to penal servitude. Fly to his aid!' I flew, and I am here."

"I see yeou be. Haow much do yeou charge?"

"The merely nominal sum of ten dollars."

"Wa-al, I don't s'pose that's tew much ef yeou kin git me off."

"Too much! I should say not, sir, I should say not. Why, my regular fee is thirty-nine dollars and fifty cents. And as for getting you off, Blackstone Bluffer

never fails. Now, Mr. Jay, tell me all frankly. Hide nothing from me, or you will be lost and may never be found again."

So Hiram told all about his interview with Mr. Queerly and the subsequent events with which the reader is already acquainted.

When he had finished, his companion said:

"It is fortunate that you have retained me. This is a complicated case, and were you without a lawyer to explain matters, Judge Dizzy would certainly convict you."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes, sir; you will be tried before the celebrated Judge Dizzy. Without me you would undoubtedly be found guilty of arson in the second degree; but I think that I can satisfy the judge that you ought not to be convicted of anything worse than burglary, and possibly you may be released altogether."

"Wa-al, that's what I want."

"Of course, of course, my dear sir. Leave all to me. My plea will be insanity."

"Which?"

"Insanity. I shall represent to the court that you were wholly irresponsible when you committed the rash act."

"That's good."

"Good, sir! It is great—sublime! Now, Mr. Jay, if you could behave in a somewhat eccentric way in the courtroom, it would add to the effect of my argument."

"I'll dew it, squire, I'll dew it."

"Insist upon dancing a Highland fling or something of that sort."

"I will."

"Indulge occasionally in a wild peal of laughter."

"I'll dew it—I'll dew it," said Hiram, warming up to the idea.

"Play your part to perfection, sir, and you will do it well; fail, and you will not succeed."

"That's all right, squire. Hiram Jay is as cute as they make 'em."

"So I should judge, sir, from the determined expression of your left eye. I can see that you have great courage and sagacity; and if you had a grudge against me I should not want to meet you on a dark night if my hands and feet were tied behind me. But I must linger no longer; business of importance calls me away. Au revoir, Mr. Jay; at your trial we shall meet again."

And the "lawyer" flitted out.

At ten o'clock Hiram's jailer appeared again, and announced:

"Your case has been called. Prepare to accompany me to the hall of justice."

And he began to festoon seven or eight yards of heavy iron chain about the unlucky hayseed's neck.

"What's them fer?" asked Hiram, ruefully.

"They, sir, are to prevent you from doing violence to the court should it chance to arouse your ungovernable temper. We cannot take too many precautions with men of your stamp. Come on now."

Staggering under the weight of his chains, Hiram followed his jailer up the cellar stairs, and into the "courtroom," which was situated in the kitchen of the house.

It was a dizzy-looking old courtroom, and if Hiram had not been as green as a peck of spinach he would have seen through the imposture at once.

Behind a rickety desk was seated one of the boys, made up as the judge. Two or three others stood around in the character of court officers, and others, in various

"rigs," were distributed through the room. The jury was conspicuous by its absence.

"So this is the prisoner, Hiram Jay, is it?" said the judge, adjusting his eyeglasses, as the hayseed was brought in.

"Yes, your honor," returned the jailer.

"Well, a more desperate-looking villain I never laid eyes on. Jay, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Wa-al, squire, I calc'late I ain't no more guilty than yeou be."

"Silence! Do not dare to couple our names. What have I, Erastus Dizzy, in common with you?"

"I——"

"Silence! Let the case proceed."

Then the alleged district attorney arose and started in on his speech, which began somewhat as follows:

"I should be unmindful of the solemn trust imposed in me by the people of this great and enlightened community did I not, at the very beginning of my remarks, express my utter horror and detestation of the class of men to which this ruffian, Hiram Jay, belongs.

"Think of it, brethren, while we are wearing out shoe leather and making nervous wrecks of ourselves just to get the wherewithal to satisfy the landlord and the washerwoman, men of the Hiram Jay stamp are living on the fat of the land, because they don't have to work for the scads—they simply print 'em off as they need 'em.

"Oh, it makes my blood boil when I gaze upon the crime-seared face of the prisoner and think of the fun he must have had without working for it, while I was hustling ten hours a day for the paltry salary of a district attorney."

The unprincipled youth went on in this way for about ten minutes, and then the judge called the first witness.

This individual was one of the boys made up as an old woman.

Having been sworn upon a copy of "Robinson Crusoe," the witness testified that she was a chambermaid in the hotel where Hiram had boarded, and had listened at the key-hole while he was making his bargain with Mr. Queerly.

The examination and cross-examination were so ridiculous that all in the room were convulsed with laughter except Hiram.

He took it all in dead earnest, and as the testimony piled up against him gave himself up for lost.

"Don't be discouraged," whispered Mr. Bluffer in his ear. "All will be well when I make my great speech in your defense. In the meantime, behave in as eccentric a manner as possible in order to convey the impression that you are non compos mentis."

Thus adjured, Hiram playfully kicked off a chair, at the same time uttering what he intended for a wild laugh.

"Repeat that offense," roared the judge,—"and I will fine you five hundred dollars for contempt of court."

Hiram collapsed.

The second witness, who was now called, proved to be Oliver.

As Hiram gazed at his woebegone face and tear-stained eyes he felt that he had at least one friend left.

The youth having been sworn on the copy of "Crusoe," the district attorney asked him:

"What is your name, my lad?"

"Oliver Sudden," sobbed the witness.

"Calm yourself, my boy. State what you know about this case."

"He is innocent—my angel employer is as innocent

and pure as the driven snow, if not considerably more so," howled Oliver, feigning great emotion. "He would not touch a penny belonging to another if there was a five-dollar bill just as handy. Oh, spare him, spare him, and I will bless you with my dying breath."

"All this has got nothing to do with the case," interrupted the judge. "Answer the question that was put to you, my boy."

"What was it?"

"It was, what do you know about this case?"

"I will not tell you!" shrieked Oliver. "Wild car horses could not tear the information from me."

"You refuse to answer?" demanded the judge.

"I do."

"Then you stand committed for contempt of court, and are fined seventy-eight dollars and sentenced to imprisonment for one year."

"Lost, lost!" wailed Oliver, as he seated himself. "But, thank heaven, I have not betrayed my employer."

"Oliver," said the hayseed, "you're a good boy, b'gosh!"

"I have only done my duty," returned the youth, modestly.

"Wa-al, I won't fergit this ef I git off."

"That's all right, Mr. Jay."

"I'll give yeou a quarter—gum-swizzled ef I don't."

"You are so liberal, Mr. Jay!"

"I allers was that way. But I'm 'fraid I ain't a-goin' tew git off. That there jedge don't seem tew take tew me over much."

"I fear the worst myself."

Just then the judge interrupted with:

"What are you two whispering about? Be silent or it will be the worse for you. Where is the next witness?"

"Mr. Queerly," the individual from whom Hiram had purchased the alleged counterfeit money, was now brought into court.

He was subjected to a long burlesque examination, and testified, with great apparent terror, that he had sold the hayseed the money.

"How much did you get for it?" thundered the judge.

"One hundred dollars, your honor."

"Where is it?"

"What?"

"The hundred dollars, of course."

"In my pocket."

"I'll take charge of it; hand it over."

Mr. Queerly did so.

"I'll hand it back to Jay when his term of imprisonment is up," remarked Judge Dizzy, as he transferred the roll of bills to his vest pocket.

Then the trial went on.

At least half a dozen more witnesses were called, but we have not space to give an account of the proceedings in detail.

Suffice it to say that before the trial was over Hiram was pretty mad. He interrupted the festivities several times, and was severely reprovved by the judge.

One of the witnesses testified that to his certain knowledge Hiram had been a Caribbean pirate and had been known for many years as Gory Carlos, the Red-handed Terror of the Spanish Main.

Another stated that the hayseed had been a member of the Tweed ring and had stolen seventy million dollars from the city of New York; and still another testified that it was Hiram who set fire to Chicago.

When the witnesses were all through Hiram's lawyer, Mr. Bluffer, arose and began his speech.

"How any man can convict my client of this crime is beyond my comprehension. It ought to be plain enough to any one with two eyes in his head that Hiram Jay is not responsible for anything he does, he is simply a driveling idiot. Why, he does not know as much as a six months old infant. Talk about a man who don't know enough to go in when it rains! Why, Hiram Jay actually does not know enough to be cold when the thermometer is away down below zero; and he is so unintelligent that in the summer when every one else is gasping for breath he actually has not sense enough to perspire. Look at him now, and if you do not say that he is the biggest fool you ever saw I will pay for a wine supper for the crowd."

The youth went on in this way until Hiram was so mad that he could not stand it any longer.

Springing to his feet, he shouted:

"It's all a darned lie. I've got more sense 'n the hull lot o' yeou put tewgether, an' I ain't a-goin' tew set an' hear no more talk o' that kind."

" 'Twouldn't do no good."

"Yes, it would, too. Why, Judge Dizzy is always open to offers of that sort."

"Be yeou sure, Oliver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, then, what are you two talking about?" inquired the judge suspiciously.

"Jedge," said Hiram, "kin I speak with yeou alone?"

"You can, sir," was the prompt reply. "Just step into my private office."

And he led the way into the front basement.

"Now, Mr. Jay," he demanded, "what is it?"

"Wa-al, jedge, I jest wanted tew say that ef yeou'll let me off I'll give yeou ten dollars aout o' that there hundred."

"Enough, sir, enough; why didn't you say so before? Here are your ninety dollars. Come back into the courtroom with me."

They went back and the judge announced:



STAGGERING UNDER HIS CHAINS, HIRAM FOLLOWED HIS JAILER UP THE CELLAR STAIRS, AND INTO THE "COURTROOM," WHICH WAS SITUATED IN THE KITCHEN OF THE HOUSE.

"Enough, sir, enough!" yelled Mr. Bluffer. "I see that you are not satisfied with my line of defense."

"Darned ef I be."

"Then I throw up the case."

And he stalked majestically out of the room.

"Well, I've fooled away about as much time on the case as I care to myself," said Judge Dizzy, "so just to settle the matter in short order I sentence you, Hiram Jay, to imprisonment at hard labor for the rest of your unnatural life."

Hiram fell back in his chair with wide open mouth.

Just at this moment Oliver whispered in his ear:

"Why don't you 'fix' the judge?"

"Hey?"

"You've heard what New York justice is; just tell him that you want a private interview with him. When you get him alone tell him that if he will let you off you'll give him ten dollars out of the hundred of yours that he holds."

"New evidence having been brought to my attention, I have decided that the prisoner is not guilty, and he is therefore discharged, as is also his young friend, Oliver Sudden. You may both go."

Hiram lost not a moment in getting outside the door, followed by Oliver.

"Wa-al," he said, as he galloped down the street, "that's about the narrerest escape ever I had. Naow I be goin' back tew Saouth Dusenbury."

But as usual Oliver's eloquence prevailed, and the hayseed consented to remain "jest a couple o' days longer."

That night the boys had a grand time on Hiram's ten dollars, and destroyed the money's worth of ice cream, candy, cigarettes and other luxuries.

And in the meantime Hiram was doing his best to get into another scrape.

But of that more in our next.

CHAPTER V.

HIRAM DISSIPATES.

Of course, after his release from durance vile Hiram asserted as usual that he was firmly resolved to return at once to South Dusenbury; and as usual Oliver succeeded, without much trouble, in persuading him not to do so.

"Wa-al," said Hiram, "I'll try it a few days longer; but, b'gosh, the first stroke o' ill-luck I hev I'm goin' ter git up an' git in the quickest time yeou ever seed, ef I am able tew travel."

"All right, sir, but don't anticipate evil; it will be time enough to worry about it when it gets here."

"Wa-al," grumbled the hayseed, "as well as I kin make aout, the only thing tew dew in the city is tew be allers on the lookaout fer trouble. The minnit yeou stop watchin' fer it an' try to hev a good time, suthin' happens."

"Oh, I think you are mistaken, Mr. Jay."

"No, I ain't, either. I guess I'm about the most broke-up man in York tew-day—gum-swizzled ef I don't."

"Oh, no, Mr. Jay."

"Oh, yes! An' naow I'm a-goin' daown tew that there barroom an' git suthin' tew brace me up."

"You are, sir?"

"Yes, I be. Ef I had tew stay in this here city much longer, I'd hev tew take drink, b'gosh—I'd be driv tew it."

This conversation took place in Hiram's room in the hotel.

As he spoke the hayseed started for the door.

"Be careful, sir," Oliver warned him.

"Hey?"

"I say be careful. You know how drink flies to your head."

"Let her fly," shouted the desperate hayseed. "Darned ef I keer."

"But you are a pillar in the church."

"I be when I'm ter hum; but I'm blamed if I think any man could be a consistent church member an' live in this here taown."

"Well, remember what Solomon says about looking upon the wine when it is red."

"Wa-al, I won't look at it long, Oliver; besides, I ain't a-goin' tew take wine; rye is good enough fer me."

"Solomon's remarks applied with equal force to whisky."

"Wa-al Solomon didn't live in York—that's all I've got tew say."

And Hiram galloped out of the room, while Oliver rolled up his eyes in pretended horror.

In about an hour he came back, a changed man.

And not changed for the better, either.

He had forgotten all his sorrows, but he couldn't walk straight.

He zig-zagged into the room, tried to seize a chair, missed it and sat down on the floor with a crash that shook the house.

"What is the matter, Mr. Jay?" inquired Oliver artlessly.

"Whazzermarrer?" repeated Hiram, glaring at him.

"That's what I said."

"'Zall right, Oliver."

And pillowing his aged head upon the edge of the

coal-scuttle, the hayseed sank into a more or less sweet slumber.

Then Oliver sat down and tried to think up a new job.

"It seems too bad," he mused, "to see a good man going astray in this manner. To be sure he has suffered a good deal, but he ought not to let it break him thusly. I have always understood that suffering chastened a man, as it were, brought out the best qualities in his nature and made him a good citizen and an intelligent voter. But Hiram does not seem to be built that way. What can be done to make him realize that these things are thus?"

Oliver thought, and thought very hard, and as those who know him may imagine, he did not have to think very long.

Presently a bright smile irradiated his features.

He had thought of a scheme.

"What is the use of sending embroidered handkerchiefs and revised Testaments and gilt-edged poker decks to the heathen when so much good can be done right here at home?" he asked himself. "Guess I'll go out and swallow some fresh air and arrange all the details of this little racket. Mr. Jay is lucky in having me for a friend. Some boys with slow and sluggish natures would let the time hang heavily on their hands, but I should not feel as if I were earning my fifty cents a day if I did that."

And humming the "Ninety and Nine," the conscientious youth meandered out.

When he returned from his walk, several hours later, Hiram was just waking up.

He was a miserable looking object enough, and Oliver gazed upon him with great apparent solicitude.

"How do you feel, Mr. Jay?"

"Sick," groaned the hayseed.

"Well, you look it."

"Dew, hey?"

"Well, I should say so. You'd better let whisky alone."

"Can't dew it till my system gits kinder braced up, Oliver."

"Oh, give you're system a rest."

"Oliver, yeou air disrespectful."

"I'm only speaking for your good, Mr. Jay."

The hayseed struggled to his feet and began "slicking up" his hair before the mirror.

"Mebbe yeou air, Oliver, but I guess I'm 'baout old enough tew look aout fer myself."

"You ought to be, but you ain't."

"Hey?"

"I say you ought to be and you are."

"Wa-al, I reckon I be."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Never you mind," responded the hayseed, lurching over to one side and catching hold of the bureau to steady himself.

"You seem very tired, Mr. Jay," remarked Oliver, turning away to conceal a smile.

"Wa-al, I be."

"You seemed to be when you came in."

Hiram looked bewildered.

"When did I come in, Oliver?"

"Don't you remember?"

"Darned ef I dew."

"Don't you remember falling on the floor with a dull, sickening thud?"

"Say, Oliver"—and the granger's face grew severe—"yeou're jokin', an' I don't like it."

Oliver's youthful countenance assumed a shocked look.

"Oh, Mr. Jay!"

"That's all right," interrupted Hiram, as he tried to button his collar with a lead pencil. "Yeou wanter remember that I am a good deal older an' know a darned sight more'n yeou dew."

"Oh, I know that, of course," responded the youth, with an air of the deepest humiliation.

"Wa-al, yeou jest bear it in mind, then."

And pulling his right boot on his left foot, and vice versa, the old man started for the door.

"Be careful, Mr. Jay," cried Oliver.

"What of?"

"Whisky."

In reply Hiram only slammed the door violently.

Then Oliver leaned back and indulged in a cherubic smile.

He knew that the old countryman would be rendered only more obstinate by opposition, and would go off and fill up with his favorite beverage again.

Hiram did not return until ten o'clock that evening, and then he was a show.

He had lost his collar and one of his cuffs, and instead of the silk "plug" hat he wore when he went out, he had on an old battered straw hat, even worse than the one which he had worn when he came to the city.

Where he had been Oliver never found out, for the next day the hayseed himself could not remember, but it was very evident that he had fallen into the hands of the Philistines.

And he was so overcome by his potations that he could not hold his eyes open.

Uttering a short laugh, he fell on the bed, and in a moment was plunged in unconsciousness.

Oliver shook him several times, but could not succeed in rousing him.

Then he knew that all was in readiness for the consummation of his scheme.

"This will be a great thing for Mr. Jay," he murmured, as he deposited an empty bottle, labeled "Laudanum—Poison!" on the table beside the bed. "In after years he will thank me for putting up this little job to save him from a career of crime."

The youth then left the room, closing the door, which had a spring lock.

Then he turned out the gas in the hall and allowed it to escape for a few minutes until the odor became strong enough to suit his purpose.

Having relighted it, he rushed down to the office with an expression of such horror on his face that as soon as the clerk saw him he demanded:

"What's the matter?"

"Mr. Jay!" gasped Oliver.

"What about him?"

"He has——"

"Well, what?"

"Destroyed himself!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"He has killed himself."

"Nonsense."

"It is true. For some time he has been despondent and I have feared the worst."

"Great Scott! do you really mean it?" shouted the clerk, beginning to get excited.

"Of course I do. Can you think that I would jest upon such a subject?"

"Is he really dead?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No. He has locked himself in his room, and there is a strong smell of gas coming out of it."

"Good gracious! Another of that sort, eh? Well, we'll try to save him for the sake of the house, if not for his own."

He then called a porter, and the two rushed upstairs, closely followed by the ubiquitous Oliver.

"Phew! the smell of gas is fearful!" exclaimed the clerk. "If it all comes from Jay's room it must have been going for a long time, and I've no doubt that he's dead."

"Oi t'ink ye're roight, sorr," added the porter.

"Lost! lost!" wailed Oliver. "My best friend has passed away."

"Oh, shut up!" cried the clerk pettishly. "You give me a stitch in my side."

"Have you no heart, man?" sobbed Oliver.

The clerk deigned no reply.

"Sure Oi have," said the porter, "an a pair o' lungs, too, an' begorra this gas is playin' the mischief with 'em, so it is."

"Michael!" bawled the clerk.

"Sorr?"

"Burst open the door."

"Yes, sorr."

But the door was a strong one, and it took the united efforts of the clerk and his two companions to break it open.

They succeeded at last, and rushed into the room, all three holding their noses, the clerk and porter imagining that the apartment was filled with gas.

Michael rushed to the windows and threw them open.

Then all hands gathered around the bed, where Hiram was peacefully slumbering.

"Is he dead, d'ye t'ink, sorr?" asked the porter.

"Dead, you fool!" returned the clerk impatiently. "Do you suppose a dead man could snore like that?"

"Shure I dunno."

"But he is in a comatose condition, and we may not be able to restore him to consciousness again."

"D'ye tell me so, sorr?"

"Say, oh, say that you can save him, and an orphan's blessing will follow you throughout your career!" wailed Oliver.

"Oh, sit down on yourself!" responded the clerk. "You're worse than the grip. Aha!"—as he caught sight of the bottle on the table.

"Fwhat's the matther, sorr?"

"What, oh, what have you discovered?" shrieked Oliver.

"You see that bottle?"

"Yes."

"Read the label."

"It says 'Laudanum—Poison,' " moaned Oliver.

"Exactly; and if the hayseed has taken this full of laudanum I don't believe any power on earth can save him."

"Cannot something be done?" demanded Oliver.

"Yes. Michael!"

"Sorr?"

"Go down and tell Dr. McSquills to come up here in double-quick time."

"And tell him," added Oliver, "to bring his stomach pump with him."

"A good idea," said the clerk. "Hurry, Michael, or you may be too late."

The Irishman rushed out.

"The air seems remarkably clear of gas, considering

the very short time that we have had the windows open," said the clerk, half suspiciously.

"There is a tremendous draught, you see," returned Oliver. "I am able to breathe quite freely now. Do you think the doctor can save Mr. Jay, sir?"

"Well, I don't know; he seems pretty far gone. He wouldn't be a heavy loss to the community, and I think his idea of doing away with himself was a pretty good one, but I don't want him to die here."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it gives the house a bad name. Besides, we've had a little too much of that thing here."

"You have?"

"Yes; why at one time I thought of establishing a suite of rooms especially for suicides, where they would find all conveniences and wouldn't disturb the other guests of the house who were eccentric enough to want to linger a little longer in this vale of woe. Oh, this is a great house for suicides."

"Indeed."

him; so after a smile and a nod to the clerk, he propped the unconscious Hiram up in bed, stuck one end of the old pump down his throat, and began operations.

It did not take him long to relieve the hayseed of all he had eaten for some time past, and to restore him to a state of consciousness.

A worse frightened man than Hiram, when he awoke and saw the group around him, is seldom seen.

"I—I'll be gum-swizzled!" he feebly ejaculated.

"He breathes—he speaks!" howled Oliver in the voice of an East Side tragedian. "Thank heaven! he still lives."

"W-w-what's the matter?" demanded Hiram.

"Be very quiet, sir," interposed Dr. McSquills, "or I will not be answerable for the result."

"B-but what's all this raow abaout?" persisted the hayseed.

"You know very well what it is about, sir," returned the physician sternly. "But I have no more time to waste with you. I have done what I could for you, and



PILLOWING HIS AGED HEAD UPON THE EDGE OF THE COAL-SCUTTLE, THE HAYSEED SANK INTO A MORE OR LESS SWEET SLUMBER, WHILE OLIVER SAT DOWN TO THINK UP A NEW JOB.

"Yes; when a man can't think of any other way to amuse himself, he comes here and slays himself, as this old gawk has tried to do. We had a queer case last month."

"What was it?"

"Oh, a fellow got mad because his wife wouldn't give him a second piece of pie at dinner. He thought she had ceased to love him, and he came round here, hired a room, chewed up a whole bar of yellow soap, and then lay down to die. But the soap seemed to agree with him, and instead of passing away he woke up a few hours later with a big appetite. Now he threatens to sue the house for damages because he did not expire in horrible agony."

"That's hard luck."

"I should say so."

Just then Dr. McSquills, who kept a drugstore on the ground floor of the hotel, pranced in, stomach-pump in hand.

He knew from experience just what was expected of

now you must take care of yourself if you expect to recover."

And Dr. McSquills marched out of the room.

"If I were the proprietor of this place I'd prosecute you," added the clerk indignantly, as he waltzed out after the doctor.

"An' so w'u'd Oi, begorra!" said Michael, staggering out with the basin.

Hiram gazed helplessly at Oliver.

"Wa-al, I'll be gum-swizzled!" he exclaimed. "What's the meanin' o' this, Oliver?"

"Don't yeou know, sir?"

"Blamed ef I dew. Dew yeou?"

"Why, certainly."

"Wa-al, what is it? Who was that there feller with the machine in his hand?"

"He was the president of the Society for the Prevention of Jim Jams."

"The which?"

Oliver repeated the statement.

"I never heerd o' no sich serciety."

"Oh, it has been in existence for a long time. When they see a man with more alcohol in his system than is good for him, they follow him with a stomach-pump and relieve him of it."

"Haow yeou talk, Oliver!"

"Oh, it's all true, Mr. Jay. The society has accomplished a great and good work, and has reduced the resident population of snakes nearly thirty-seven per cent., according to the last census."

"Wa-al, I reck'n it wouldn't make no difference haow much I drunk, I'd never see no snakes."

"Don't be too sure of that, Mr. Jay."

"I be sure. The Jays is a mighty hard-headed race."

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"It hain't, hey?"

"No, sir."

"Wa-al, I don't agree with yeou, Oliver. I——"

The hayseed paused, his mouth wide open.

On the floor at his feet he distinctly beheld a small green snake squirming about, and apparently endeavoring to attract his attention by every means in its power.

He uttered a howl, as he drew his big feet up on the bed to get them out of the reptile's way.

"What's the matter, Mr. Jay?" demanded Oliver.

"Don't yeou see nothin'?" bawled Hiram.

"Please moderate your tone, sir, or you will arouse the house. Of course I see something. Am I not looking at you?"

"B-but don't yeou see that there snake on the floor there?"

"A snake?"

"Yes."

"Certainly not. Tut, tut, Mr. Jay! this is as I feared."

"Why, there's another—an' another. Gum-swizzle it, Oliver, **this is awful.**"

"Oh, it is simply imagination, Mr. Jay. You have disregarded my warning, and this is the result."

Just then a fourth snake attracted Hiram's attention, and, with a yell of terror, he covered his head with the bedclothes.

Then Oliver quietly gathered up the mechanical snakes—he had purchased them that day—and thrust them into his pocket.

"Brace up, Mr. Jay," he then said. "Don't give in this way. You know enough that in reality there are no snakes here. Just use the enormous will power which you possess and you won't see the things."

"Wa-al, I'll try it."

And the hayseed peered cautiously out from beneath the clothes.

"Why, they be gone, Oliver!"

"Didn't I tell you so, sir?"

"Wa-al, Oliver, this here'll be a lesson tew me."

"I hope so, Mr. Jay."

"Yeou jest set daown an' write aout an ironclad pledge, an' I'll sign the thing—blamed ef I don't!"

The youth obeyed, the pledge was signed, and a few minutes later Hiram dropped off to sleep in the hope that his troubles were at an end.

But they were not, as it will be our duty to show in our next chapter.

enjoy himself, and to think that "York" was not such a very bad place after all.

To be sure he met with various minor accidents—got lost half a dozen times, had his pocket picked once or twice, and experienced other little vicissitudes of that nature; but as his life was not placed in imminent peril, he thought himself in luck.

All might have gone well had he not in an evil hour met one Colonel Roanoke Peyton, an ex-Southern fire-eater, who had degenerated into a barroom statue, and whose headquarters were in the cafe connected with the hotel which the hayseed honored with his patronage.

It was Colonel Peyton's habit to lounge about the place several hours each day, talking about his experiences during the war; and if his stories were to be believed, not a single battle had been won by the Confederates the success of which was not directly due to him.

If he had any money he would spend it freely, if he had not he usually managed to get some one else to spend theirs for him.

As he seldom had much cash of his own, he was often obliged to "hustle" to a considerable extent to satisfy the cravings of his nature for alcoholic refreshment.

As he was pretty well known in the hotel, he had to work rather harder for a dime's worth of bad whisky than he would have had to earn a dollar in any other occupation.

But Colonel Peyton liked the excitement of the life, and he kept right on year after year, the silver threads in his mustache growing thicker and thicker, and the red of his nose deeper and deeper.

After a while Colonel Peyton got to be as much a part of the place as the bottles on the shelf, and the proprietor of the establishment would hardly have felt as if he could get through the day if the thirsty Southerner had not been on hand.

The colonel never annoyed the guests of the house, never made any advances to a person with whom he was not acquainted, but if any one whom he thought worth knowing took the initiative and addressed him, the old warrior always made the best of his opportunity.

Hiram had been in the house several days before he made the colonel's acquaintance—in fact, it was after the events related in our last, when, coming in from a walk one afternoon, he happened to meet the Southerner in the hotel office and nodded to him.

This was enough for Colonel Peyton, who happened to be very thirsty.

Grasping Hiram's hand, he shook it cordially, exclaiming:

"My dear sah, I'm glad to know you. Mr. Jay, I believe."

"That's my name, squire."

"Colonel, sah; Colonel Peyton. My card, sah."

And he handed Hiram a greasy yellow card which the hayseed stuck in his pocket, saying:

"Military man, hey?"

"Yes, sah, served in the late wah, sah, and I may say, sah, with distinguished success."

"I wanter know. I was drafted myself, but I sent a substitute."

"Ah! indeed, Mr. Jay? Then we have both served our country and may call ourselves companions in arms, sah. Have a drink with me, Mr. Jay?"

And linking his arm in the hayseed's, the colonel attempted to draw him in the direction of the barroom. But Hiram resisted.

CHAPTER VI.

HIRAM AS AN INVALID.

For some days Hiram kept his vow of temperance, and as Oliver "let up on him" for a time, he began to

"Can't dew it, colonel."

"Why not, sah?"

And the warrior's face grew grave at the thought that the drink, which he already tasted in anticipation, might, after all, slip through his fingers, as it were, before it reached his capacious throat.

"I've sworn off," said Hiram.

"Sworn off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Jay! nonsense, my dear sah!"

"'Tain't nonsense, neither. Licker don't seem tew agree with me."

"Oh, that is folly, Mr. Jay. Alcohol taken in moderation prolongs life."

"Wa-al, I dunno's I wanter hev my life prolonged ef I've got tew spend it in the company o' green snakes, an' sich like."

"Snakes! Ha, ha, ha! So you've had that experience, my dear sah?"

"Wa-al, I sh'd say I hed."

"Well, don't let that worry you, sah. My friend, Billy, the barkeeper, has got some stuff in there that would scare off a whole ten-acre lot filled with snakes. Come on, my dear sah."

Hiram allowed himself to be persuaded, in spite of his numerous good resolutions, and arm-in-arm the couple entered the barroom.

"Now, sah," said the colonel, prancing up to the bar, "what shall it be? Name your poison, sah."

"I calc'late a leetle mite o' whisky won't do me no harm."

"Harm, sah! It will put new life into you. I'll take the same. Not that bottle, Billy"—as the bartender placed one upon the counter—"nothing but the best will do for my friend Jay and myself. The 1820 bottle, Billy, my boy."

The required bottle was produced, and the colonel poured out a very liberal allowance of the beverage.

"Now, Mr. Jay, give me your opinion of this article," he said. "But first, sah, permit me to propose a sentiment: May the hinges of our friendship never rust, sah."

"Haw, haw! pretty darned good!" laughed Hiram.

Then the two alleged warriors emptied their glasses.

"The real stuff, eh, my boy?" said the doughty colonel, a satisfied smile illumining his time-worn countenance. "I can see that you're a man of taste, sah. Yes, sah. That's a private bottle that Billy keeps for my use. Only the best is good enough for Roanoke Peyton. But, tut, tut!"

The smile had faded from the colonel's face; he was nervously feeling in his pockets.

"Billy," to whom this was an old "gag," leaned wearily back to see how it would work this time.

"What's the matter, colonel?" asked Hiram, innocently.

"This is very vexatious. I must have left my money at home, sah. Ah, now I remember! I changed my waistcoat this morning, and there was a roll of twenties in one of the pockets of the one I left home. This is really too bad!"

"That's all right, colonel," said Hiram, pleased at having been the recipient of so much attention from so distinguished a man as he imagined his companion to be.

"Sah?"

"I say that's all right. I'll pay for the drinks."

"No, sah!"

And the colonel brought his fist down on the bar with a resounding whack.

"Hey?"

"I say no, sah! Invite a gentleman to drink, and then permit him to pay the reckoning? No, sah, Roanoke Peyton would nevah consent to that—nevah, sah!"

"That's all right, colonel."

"No, sah, it is not all right, sah. But I'll tell you what I'll do, sah,—I'll allow you to lend me the trifling amount, sah, until we meet again."

"Jest as yeou say."

And Hiram fished the required sum out of his capacious pocket.

"Now, Billy," said the colonel, "I shall depend upon you to remind me of this little indebtedness."

"All right, colonel," returned the grinning bartender.

"You know how deucedly treacherous my memory is, Billy."

"Oh, yes," said Billy, who had good reason to know.

"Then don't forget, my good fellow, to put me in mind of the fact that I owe Mr. Jay forty cents. And, by Jove! I haven't even enough small change to pay my car-fare downtown. Tut, tut, tut!"

"I'll let yeou hev a dollar, colonel," said Hiram, drawing out his old wallet.

"No, sah! no, sah!"

"Yeou might's well take it," and Hiram extended the dollar bill.

"Well, well, to oblige you, sah, to oblige you," and the colonel pocketed the bill. "But this is infernally annoying, sah. The ideah of Roanoke Peyton borrowing a dollah from a gentleman whom he nevah met before in his life! By Jove! sah, there are not four men in New York that I'd accept such a favor from."

"There are not two that would grant it," muttered the bartender, but he spoke so low that no one heard him.

Then came a dead silence.

The bartender gazed from one to the other of his customers with an inquiring expression of countenance, Colonel Peyton stared vacantly at the ceiling, and Hiram shifted from one foot to the other, wondering what the strange, ominous silence meant.

Finally he "dropped."

"Hev suthin' with me, colonel," he said.

"Ahem! I don't care if I do, sah," was the reply, "although I seldom drink much at this time of day. The same, if you please, Billy."

This was the beginning of a grand carouse which lasted until eleven o'clock that night.

The time was not all spent in the hotel, but in various neighboring resorts, and of course Hiram paid all the bills.

In a short time the hayseed had forgotten all about his pledge, and before he had got back to his room he had forgotten pretty much everything he ever knew.

It happened that Oliver had had an appointment with his guardian that evening, and did not return until nearly eleven.

He was surprised at not finding Hiram in his room, but while he was wondering what had become of the old man a noise outside attracted his attention.

Stepping to the door, a painful spectacle met his gaze.

The unconscious form of the hayseed was being borne along the hall by two of the porters, while Colonel Peyton brought up the rear.

"Mr. Jay has been overcome by the—er—the heat, my young friend," said the colonel, who, though he

had asborbed more alcohol than his companion, was in full possession of his faculties.

"Indeed! I'd no idea it was such a warm evening," said Oliver, simply. "Do you think he'll get over it?"

"He will be all right in the morning, my boy—don't be alarmed. Get him a brandy-and-soda as soon as he wakes up."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, boys, lay him on the bed."

The porters obeyed, and the trio then took their leave.

"So he's been at it again, eh?" said Oliver, a sweet, sad smile stealing over his face as he gazed at his unconscious employer. "Well, something's got to be done about this, and if I enjoy the pleasure of my own personal acquaintance, I think I know exactly what to do."

The fact is, Oliver had recently heard of a trick played by a certain notorious practical joker, and repeated later by his uncle, Major Biff, of which he thought it would be very easy to make Hiram a victim.

He accordingly dispatched a note to a young friend of his—the same who had personated the judge in Hiram's recent "trial"—asking his assistance, and then went to bed, and slept soundly until six o'clock the next morning.

At that hour he arose and began preparations for his new racket.

Hiram was still sleeping, and continued to do so until Oliver got ready to wake him up, which was at about eight o'clock.

As may be imagined, the hayseed felt anything but hilarious when his scattered senses returned, and he slowly opened his eyes.

One by one the events of the previous day returned to him, and he felt, as he afterward stated, like kicking himself all over "York" for having made such a "gum-swizzled" fool of himself.

He gazed around him, and beheld upon a table by his bedside a goodly array of medicine bottles, glasses, spoons, etc.

And at the foot of the bed stood Oliver, an expression of the most intense anxiety and suspense upon his mobile features.

"Oh, thank heaven, my efforts have been crowned with success, and he is spared!" bawled the ingenious youth, clasping his hands and rolling up his eyes until only the whites showed.

"What in thunder is the matter with yeou, Oliver?" demanded the hayseed. "Can't yeou make less noise?"

"Have I agitated you?" cried Oliver, hastening to the old man's bedside. "I am very sorry, but I will be more careful in the future, for the doctor's orders were that you be kept very quiet."

"The—the which?" stammered Hiram.

"The doctor's orders."

"What doctor?"

"Why, Dr. Spleen."

"Who's he?"

"The eminent physician who has been in attendance upon you during your illness."

"My wha-a-at?"

"Your illness. But do not excite yourself, Mr. Jay, or the consequences may be serious."

"Say! what be yeou talking abaout, anyhow?" demanded Hiram impatiently, as he started to get out of bed.

"Stop, stop!" howled Oliver; "for your life do not move!"

"Why not?"

"Do you not know? Can you not guess?"

"Gum-swizzled ef I kin."

"Are you not aware that you have been very ill?"

"Wa-al, I don't feel very chipper, an' that's a fact. I was aout with Colonel Peyton, a friend o' mine, yesterday, an'——"

"Yesterday," interrupted Oliver. "Why, Mr. Jay, it was not yesterday."

"Hey?"

"You have been in bed four weeks."

"W-w-w-what?"

The youth repeated the assertion.

"Four weks!" gasped Hiram.

"Yes, sir."

"Why, I don't remember nothin' 'baout it, Oliver."

"Of course not, sir—you were out of your head all the time."

"I was?"

"Yes, indeed. You raved about Mrs. Jay most of the time."

"What did I say?"

"Oh, you said all sorts of things—among others that you longed to have Marthy Ann infold you once more in her arms."

"Waal, I must ha' been aout o' my head ef I said that."

"Yes, sir."

"But I don't remember nothin' abaout it."

"Of course not, sir; it would be strange if you did."

"That's so. Oh, my head!"

"Does it hurt you, sir?"

"Wa-al, I sh'd say so. I feel as ef there was a trip-hammer inside of it."

"That is natural, Mr. Jay, after your long illness."

"Wa-al, I guess I'll git up."

"No, no; not for worlds would I permit you to do so. Did I not tell you, sir, that the doctor had strictly forbidden it?"

"I kinder think I'd feel better ef I got up."

"Oh, no you wouldn't; you would get a chill that might cause a relapse."

Just then the door opened, and in walked Oliver's fellow-conspirator "made up" as the doctor.

"Well, how is our patient to-day?" he began. "Ah, much better, I see. The crisis has passed, and with proper nursing he will recover. Mr. Jay," he added, stepping to the bedside, "you have been a very sick man."

"Wa-al, so it seems," groaned Hiram. "What's been the matter with me, doctor?"

"Parabola of the cerebrum, complicated with antithesis of the left auricle, superinduced by acute inflammation of the diaphragm and congestion of the thorax."

"I'll be gum-swizzled!"

"You will have to exercise great care, sir, for several weeks to prevent a relapse."

"I'll dew it. But haow dew yeou suppose I happened tew ketch the darned complaint, anyhaow, doctor?"

"It is impossible to say, Mr. Jay. The microbe might have blown in the window, or you may have eaten it in a ham sandwich, or possibly it concealed itself with fiendish ingenuity under your bed, and then climbed down your throat when you were asleep. These microbes are very artful animals, possessing almost human intelligence, and should be frowned upon by all right-minded citizens."

"Haow yeou talk, doctor!" exclaimed the bewildered Hiram.

"I know I do, sir, because I have got something to

Can about. But it is time to take your medicine now, Mr. Jay."

Oliver pranced forward and dealt out a tablespoonful of a bitter mixture from one of the bottles on the table.

Hiram swallowed it with a wry face.

"Don't think much o' that!" he said.

"I suppose not, sir, I suppose not," said the "doctor," "but let me tell you, Mr. Jay, that it is the result of years of study on my part, and is the only thing that will restore you to health."

"Oh, doesn't it seem good to see Mr. Jay himself once more?" exclaimed Oliver at this point.

"It does inded," returned the alleged physician. "And let me tell you, Mr. Jay, that you owe your life to the devotion of this noble, high-minded, self-sacrificing lad. He insisted upon nursing you alone and unaided, and went without food, drink and sleep for four weeks in succession."

"Is that so?"

"Certainly it is."

As soon as Hiram saw the date of the journal he "dropped."

He saw that he had been the victim of a trick; and wasn't he mad?

When Oliver came back he found his employer dressed. Of course he perceived at once that his racket was exposed, but he determined to put on a bold face.

"I thought yeou told me I'd been sick four weeks," howled Hiram.

"So I did, sir."

"Wa-al, yeou lied. I went aout with Colonel Peyton on the first o' the month, an' this is only the third."

"That is your imagination, sir," said the artless Oliver. "You see your brain isn't quite right yet. This is the third, but it was on the sixth of last month that you and Colonel Peyton painted the town vermilion."

"'Tain't so, Oliver. Yeou can't fule me that way."

"Well, if it isn't so then Dr. Spleen must have hypnotized me. I have told you all I know, Mr. Jay, and if you doubt the word of the little orphan boy whom



OLIVER PRANCED FORWARD AND DEALT OUT A TABLESPOONFUL OF A BITTER MIXTURE FROM ONE OF THE BOTTLES ON THE TABLE. HIRAM SWALLOWED IT WITH A WRY FACE.

"Waal, yeou're a good boy, Oliver, an' I'll give yeou a dollar when I git up."

"Oh, you are so noble, so generous, Mr. Jay!" gushed the youth.

"Wa-al, I s'pose that is one o' my failin's, but I can't help it."

"Well, you have talked enough," interposed the doctor, "and I must be going, but I've got to extract a corn for Billy Vanderbilt before breakfast. Keep very quiet, Mr. Jay, and, above all things, don't get out of bed."

And the young jokist skipped out.

To make a long story short, the two boys kept Hiram in bed all that day and the next night, dosing him with nauseating mixtures, and feeding him with gruel.

They would have kept this sort of thing up several days longer had it not chanced that, during Oliver's temporary absence, one of the hall-boys, who had heard of the hayseed's illness (and believed it to be genuine, of course), brought the old man a morning paper.

you have taught to love you, let us part and forget that we ever met."

The youth kept on in this strain for some minutes, and the end of it all was that he persuaded Hiram against his will that he was entirely innocent of the fault of which he was accused.

The consequence was that he was re-engaged; and he at once set to work thinking up a new "snap."

CHAPTER VII.

HIRAM HAS TWO LIVELY DAYS.

"Good morning, Mr. Jay," said a well-dressed, elderly stranger, who met our bucolic friend one morning as he entered the hotel office. "I am pleased to meet you, sir."

"Haow d'ye do?" returned the hayseed suspiciously, for experience had at last taught him that it was not well to put too much confidence in smooth-tongued strangers. "Dunno's I ever see yeou in my life afore, though."

"No, sir, you have not; but perhaps you know me by reputation. My name is Joyful—O. B. Joyful."

"Never heerd o' yeou."

"Indeed? I am a deacon in the St. Jonah's Church, and the superintendent of the Sabbath school."

"Yeou be?"

"Yes, sir. Now, Mr. Jay, I am informed that you are a deacon in the church at South Dusenbury."

"Yes, I be."

"Well, we should be glad to have you identify yourself with us during you stay in the city."

Hiram scratched his head.

"Wa-al, I hain't done much church-goin' sence I've bin tew York," he acknowledged.

"That is to be regretted, Mr. Jay. I understand that you are a power in the church at home."

"Wa-al," smiled the hayseed, "I've allus bin a purty active member."

"Exactly. Well, you must come and see us. I shall be glad to offer you a seat in my pew, one of the best in the church. I am sure that you will be pleased with our pastor, the Reverend Howland Strutt."

"Guess I'll drop in next Sunday."

"Do so, my dear sir."

And Mr. Joyful went on to explain all about the workings of the church system, Hiram listening with considerable interest.

"Well," said the deacon, rising at last, "I must be going. I shall look for you at the church next Sunday. Hold!"

"What's the matter?"

"Can't you come to our chapel to-night? We are to have a little entertainment for the benefit of the Sunday school. It will cost you nothing. I shall be at the door and will pass you in."

"What kind of a show is it?" asked Hiram. "It's 'baout the fust place I've heerd on sence I've bin in York that I could git intew fer nothin'."

"Oh, the entertainment will consist of singing, recitations and a few slight-of-hand tricks performed by myself."

"Kin yeou dew tricks?"

"Oh, yes, I am considered an unusually proficient amateur prestidigitateur."

"I wanter know."

"Oh, yes. Now I will give you a little specimen of my ability. Please let me have a roll of bills—the larger the better."

Hiram fished out a roll from his pocket and handed them to his companion.

"Now watch me closely," continued Mr. Joyful. "I lay the money on this table and place my hat over it."

"Yes."

"I now remove the hat, and, presto! the bills are gone."

"Wa-al, I'll be gum-swizzled!" gasped the wondering Hiram.

"I replace the hat," went on Mr. Joyful, "and again lift it—and there are your bills. Thank you, sir," and he returned the roll to the hayseed.

"That's a darned good trick!—gum-swizzled ef it ain't!" said Hiram. "Haow dew yeou dew it?"

"Possibly I shall show you this evening," returned Mr. Joyful, politely. "But now I must bid you good

morning. We shall be more than delighted to welcome you to St. Jonah's, Mr. Jay."

And, touching his hat, he walked out.

"Wa-al" mused Hiram, "he sems a purty decent sort of a chap—darned ef I don't kinder like him. Hello, Oliver!" as the youth strolled up.

"Good morning, sir. Who were you talking to just now?"

"That there gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Oh, he's a friend o' mine."

"I didn't know you had any friend in New York, Mr. Jay."

"Wa-al, he's a brother dekin."

"A deacon!" exclaimed Oliver.

"Yes."

"That fellow a deacon, sir! Why, you must be in a nightmare."

"Wa-al, he said he was," faltered Hiram.

"He falsified to a considerable extent, then. Why, I happen to know that he is, or used to be, a professional bunco steerer."

"That there gentleman a bunker man!" gasped the hayseed. "I don't believe it. I guess I kin tell a bunker man when I see him. Why, he's Deakin Joyful o' St. Jonah's Church."

"What church?"

"St. Jonah's."

"There isn't any such church, Mr. Jay."

"There isn't?"

"No, sir. What did this Deacon Joyful say to you?" Hiram told him.

"You are sure you got your roll of bills back?"

"Wa-al, I calc'late I did. What dew yeou take me fer, Oliver?"

"Oh, I know that you are as shrewd and far-seeing as they make them."

"I reck'n I be," smirked Hiram.

"But I guess you'd better take a look at that roll of bills."

With a complacent smile the hayseed drew the money from his pocket.

The next moment the smile faded away with great celerity.

"Great gosh!"

"What's the trouble, Mr. Jay?"

"I'll be gum-swizzled!"

What for?"

"Help! fire! stop thief!" bawled the old man at the top of his voice.

"What's the row?" cried the clerk, hurrying from behind his desk.

"I've ben robbed!" wailed Hiram.

"Robbed? In this house?"

"Yes, siree, right here, an' by that there Deakin Joyful. Why, there's only one bill in this here roll; the rest is all green paper cut the size o' bills."

It was even so.

The pious Deacon Joyful had substituted this roll for the one he took from Hiram, and our friend from South Dusenbury was just one hundred and ten dollars out.

It was all the money he had, and it is no wonder that he was all broken up.

A search was instituted for the "deacon," but it is scarcely necessary to state that he could not be found.

The police were notified and promised to do all in their power to recover the money, but the chances of their being able to do so did not seem very brilliant.

"Wa-al, this is 'baout the wust luck yet," moaned Hiram. "I hain't got over a dollar left, an' I can't go back tew Saouth Dusenbury ef I wanter. An' I wouldn't dare tew anyhow with all my money gone. B'gosh, I wish I'd never come tew York."

"Oh, no, you don't, Mr. Jay," said Oliver, with an insinuating smile.

"Oh, yes, I dew, Oliver."

"Well, you won't if you stop to reflect that by coming you gave employment to a poor little orphan boy, who, but for you, might have been obliged to live without work."

"Dunno's that's much consolation," grumbled the hayseed.

"Think of all the good you have done me, Mr. Jay."

"A darned sight more'n yeou've done for me."

"Oh, do not say that, Mr. Jay," wailed the youth, "or you will move me to tears. I shudder to think what I might have become if I had not met you. Perhaps some rich man would have met me and become fascinated with my Oriental loveliness and cute, cunning little ways and adopted me, and made me his heir. In that way I should probably have been ruined by too much wealth, and should never have acquired the self-reliance and copper-riveted nerve that I have in your employ."

Hiram stared at his young companion in bewilderment.

"When yeou talk so blamed fast, Oliver, an' go on like that, I'm darned ef I kin understand a gum-swizzled word yeou say."

"No matter, Mr. Jay; my childish prattle could hardly be expected to interest a man of your intelligence. Let us talk about yourself."

"There ain't much left tew talk 'baout me."

"Oh, yes, sir, a large number of ideas of various flavors occur to me."

"Wa-al, what be they?"

"You are stranded!"

"Hey?"

"Dead broke—in the language of the ancient poet, you are strapped in a strange land."

"Wa-al, I be," wailed the hayseed.

"Just so. Well, never shall it be said that Oliver Sudden, the child whom you befriended when he had not a cent to his back, or a stitch in his pocket, went back on you in the hour of your distress. You have given me a palatial home, and have lavished fifty cents a day upon me, and shall I desert you now? Never!"

"Wa-al, what be yeou a-goin' tew dew?"

"I am going to give you a large chunk of valuable advice, for which a lawyer would charge you much wealth."

"What is it?"

"Simply this: Telegraph to Mrs. Jay to send you some more money."

"Great gosh! that wouldn't dew."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"She wouldn't send it."

"Well, if she didn't you'd be no worse off than you are now."

"That's so, by jingo. Yeou're a smart boy, Oliver."

"Yes, sir. Now Mrs. Jay could send you money by telegraph so that you would get it to-night."

"Is that so, Oliver?"

"Why, certainly."

Hiram reflected a few minutes.

Then he said:

"Wa-al, I'm gum-swizzled ef I don't try it."

"I would, sir."

"I've got jest 'baout 'nough money tew pay fer the telegram."

"If you haven't I'll lend you some, sir."

So the telegram was sent.

It was written by Oliver, and read as follows:

"Send me one hundred dollars at once. Have a great speculation on hand.
HIRAM."

"The great speculation," explained the diplomatic Oliver, smilingly, "is to keep the life in your body, and I guess that's about the best speculation a man can indulge in."

"B'gosh, yeou're right, Oliver."

"Do you think she will send the money, sir?"

"Wa-al, I hev my doubts. Jedgin' from what I know o' Marthy Ann she won't. Ef she don't what'll I dew?"

"Oh, you will then have to remain in New York. You can go into Wall street, where your great shrewdness will enable you to acquire a large fortune in a short time. You can then purchase a palatial mansion on Fifth avenue and become the leader of the Four Hundred."

But Hiram did not take this rose-tinted view of the case.

He was losing some of his child-like confidence in human nature, and he only shook his head.

His forebodings were realized.

All day he hung around the telegraph office, which was located in the hotel, but no money came.

"'Tain't no use," he said to Oliver that evening, "I'll never git back to Saouth Dusenbury, an' I don't see hoaw I kin live in York."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Jay," said the clerk, who happened to overhear the dialogue, "we'll keep you until your remittances arrive."

But even this did not console Hiram, and he went to bed in low spirits.

"He needs diversion—something to keep him from getting morbid," reflected Oliver, "and it strikes me forcibly that I am just the infant to think up a scheme for restoring his buoyant spirits and putting his blood in circulation."

He did think of a scheme, and in the morning all was in readiness.

Hiram arose even bluer than when he retired.

"Hain't no money come fer me, I s'pose?" he said, as he wandered into the office.

"No, sir," replied the clerk, "but don't let that disturb you."

"No, don't worry about it, Mr. Jay," added Oliver. "Let's go in and get breakfast, and then we'll take a walk."

"S'pose I might as well," sighed the hayseed, dolefully.

Breakfast passed off with the usual eclat, and then the couple started out for their walk. Just as they left the hotel Oliver hitched a string of sausages which he had had in readiness to the hayseed's coat-tail.

At the same moment two of the youth's sinful accomplices whom he had pressed into service let loose a couple of tramp dogs that they had collared for the express purpose.

The sausages were elderly and very high flavored, and their odor attracted the attention of the animals at once.

Of course they started after Hiram; and before they

had gone a block they had been joined by four other hungry-looking canines and a one-eyed cat.

At the end of another block two more cats and three new dogs had joined the procession, and Hiram began to be conscious of their presence.

"What's all these here beasts a-follerin' us fer?" he inquired, turning so suddenly that a yellow dog, who was about to make an attempt to grab a sausage, galloped off yelping.

"I am at a loss to imagine," replied Oliver. "You must have a great fascination for dogs, Mr. Jay."

"Wa-al, a dog allers likes me, but when they git so darned familiar as all this, it's 'baout time tew dew suthin' 'baout it. Git aout, ye brutes!"

And he made a rush for the gang of animals, which scattered them, and then the two pilgrims resumed their way.

But within half a minute the dogs and cats were all back, and had been joined by others of equally impetuous natures and healthy appetites.

more than Oliver, although it was rather rough on Hiram.

The dogs and cats had a grand free fight over the hayseed's prostrate body, and made noise enough to attract the attention of every one within half a mile.

Every little while Hiram—who was so mixed up with the dogs and cats that it was hard to tell which was which—made an effort to get up, but was sure to be knocked over immediately by one of the big dogs, some of which were of about the size of molasses hogsheads.

In the midst of the melee the string of sausages was quietly snaked up an alley by a little gray cat of shrinking manners, whose chances all along had seemed slimmer than those of any of her companions.

Nobody tried to stop the fight till a policeman came along.

Then the animals were dispersed and Hiram assisted to his feet.

He had gotten the worst of the fight.



HIRAM HANDED A ROLL OF BILLS TO HIS COMPANION. "NOW WATCH ME CLOSELY," CONTINUED MR. JOYFUL. "I LAY THE MONEY ON THIS TABLE AND PLACE MY HAT OVER IT."

The procession increased every moment now.

Dogs seemed to spring out of the earth, and cats to materialize from thin air.

There were animals of all sizes, colors, breeds, sexes, nationalities, and in all conditions of repair, but they all possessed one common characteristic—they were very, very hungry.

The bystanders stood and shrieked with laughter, and heads were poked out of all the neighboring windows.

"Waal, this beats anything yet!" exclaimed Hiram, who as yet had no suspicion of the cause of all the excitement; and he was about to turn and make another rush for the beasts, when a big mastiff pushed his way to the front rank and seized the lowest sausage.

He gave it such a hard pull, the string was so strong, and fastened so securely to Hiram's coat, that the animal yanked the hayseed over backward.

Then followed a scene that afforded a good deal of innocent amusement to the bystanders, and to none

He looked like a baseball umpire at the end of a hard season.

The beasts in their excitement had neglected to consider his feelings, and he had received more bites and scratches than any of the fighters.

"I'll be gum-swizzled!" he gasped as he arose.

"What's the matther wid ye, annyhow?" demanded the policeman fiercely. "I've a great moind ter run ye in fer raisin' a disturbance on the public sthrates, so I have."

Poor Hiram knew enough by this time not to talk back to a policeman, so he only groaned wearily as he staggered off, leaning on the arm of the innocent-faced Oliver.

"It's tin days ye'll get if I catch ye at the loike ag'in," shouted the indignant officer after him.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Jay?" asked the youth solicitously.

"Be I hurt?" moaned the hayseed. "That's a fool question, Oliver. Kin I be chawed an' clawed that way by half the dogs an' cats in York an' not feel it?"

"I suppose not, sir."

"Waal, I reck'n not neither."

"But you have not sustained any serious injuries, I trust?"

"Waal, I may live through 'em an' I may not. Don't much keer ef I don't, b'gosh!"

"Oh, Mr. Jay, do not talk like that!" howled Oliver.

"Shet up! I'm agoin' tew spend the rest o' the day in my room at the tavern, an' I don't want yeou nor nobody else tew disturb me."

"That will be all right, sir. You shall have every chance to recuperate, and I will try to have the elevated trains pass your window on stilts, if I can arrange it."

"Shet up, I tell you!"

"Yes, sir."

And Oliver did "shut up."

He felt that he could afford to, for he had had at least fifty per cent. more fun than he had expected.

But Hiram's anticipations of rest were not fully realized, for he had something to worry him all the afternoon.

On his arrival at the hotel an envelope was handed him.

"The money, b'gosh!" he exclaimed, his face brightening up.

But his smile disappeared like a glass of whisky before a ward politician when he read the message inclosed.

"I'll be gum-swizzled!"

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Jay?" asked Oliver.

"I sh'd say so!"

"What is it? Haven't you got the money?"

"No. Read this."

Oliver hastily perused the telegram.

This is how it read:

"You won't get a cent. I am coming to York. Meet me at the depot at seven to-night.

"MARTHA ANN."

"This is tough, Oliver!" exclaimed the hayseed, as his companion handed him back the message.

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"B'gosh, I'm afraid tew go an' meet her."

"Why?"

"She'd get me by the hair afore all them people, an' I've stood 'baout 'nough fer one day.

"I'll tell you what you can do, sir," said Oliver smilingly.

"What?"

"Let me go and meet her. I can fix everything all right for you before we get back to the hotel."

"Will yeou dew it, Oliver?" cried Hiram eagerly.

"Why, certainly, sir."

Oliver was as good as his word; but the particulars of his meeting with Mrs. Jay we must reserve for another chapter.

In fact, she was seen; she had been the cynosure of all observers ever since she entered the train some hours before.

She was a gaunt and hungry looking woman, but she had a most determined aspect as she clutched her old carpet bag and made a break for the street.

She was attired in a green silk dress with red trimmings, a bright blue sack plentifully adorned with spangles, a red hat with two large white feathers, and a pair of bronze shoes.

Need we state the name of the original of the soul-stirring picture we have painted?

It was Martha Ann.

"Waal," she mused, as she stalked along the platform. "I calc'late they ain't none on 'em much more stylish'n I be this time. But where's that there Hiram Jay? Ef he ain't here tew meet me I'll make him suffer fer it."

Just then a smiling youth pranced up to her, exclaiming:

"Why, Mrs. Jay, is this indeed you?"

"Waal, I reck'n 'tis; but who be yeou?" was the sharp response.

"Do you not know me? I am Oliver Sudden, your husband's child employee."

Mrs. Jay's features relaxed.

"Oh, it's yeou, is it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where's Hiram?"

"Do not, oh, do not, ask me?" wailed Oliver, with a face like an undertaker's at a millionaire's funeral.

"Hey?" demanded Martha Ann, sharply.

"I say, do not press the question."

"Why not?"

"I cannot, must not, tell you all."

"Waal, I reck'n you'll hev tew. Say, what does all this mean, boy?"

And the old lady stopped short, regardless of the hurrying throng, and caught her youthful companion by the arm.

"Must I teil?" wailed Oliver.

"Yes, yeou must."

"Then come on, Mrs. Jay, and you shall know all. I have a chariot drawn by two prancing steeds who are impatiently champing their bits at the door. Enter it with me and I will tell you where Mr. Jay is."

And he led Martha Ann to a dilapidated looking hack, to which were attached two nondescript animals, apparently in the last stages of consumption and assisted her to enter it.

As the reader has guessed, he had a new racket on hand.

He expected it to be the last which he would have an opportunity to work on his employer, so he had gotten it up regardless of everything save his own eccentric tastes, and it promised to be a corker.

If his part in it were discovered—and it seemed inevitable that it would be—he was prepared to dematerialize and let Hiram and Martha Ann fight it out by themselves.

He was sure that the old lady would take her husband back to South Dusenbury in any event, so he thought he might as well have all the fun he could before it was too late.

"How well you are looking, Mrs. Jay," was his first remark after entering the hack.

"I don't hev no time tew be sick," responded the old lady, sharply.

"Indeed?"

CHAPTER VIII.

"MARTHY ANN" ARRIVES.

The shades of night were falling with their accustomed rapidity and reckless abandon when an elderly woman might have been seen alighting from a train at the Grand Central Depot.

"No. Sence Hiram left the charge o' the farm tew me I've had my hands full."

"I suppose so. But I should not think you would have time to get up such magnificent costumes as that which you have on."

Mrs. Jay smiled complacently.

" 'Tis kinder stylish, I reck'n."

"Stylish is not the word."

"Wa-al, I jest thought that, ef Hiram could spend aour hard airnings in York cavortin' raound with Jay Gould an' them folks, I might's well hev suthin' tew."

"You are right, Mrs. Jay."

"So I had these here things made, an' they cost me nigh ontew twenty-four dollars."

"Indeed, Mrs. Jay?"

"Yes, they did. But never mind 'baout them naow; tell me 'baout Hiram. Why wa'n't he at the depot tew meet me?"

"Oh, how—how can I answer?" sobbed Oliver, pretending to be terribly agitated.

"Wa-al, yeou tell the trewth, or it'll be the wuss fer yeou."

"He—he was otherwise engaged."

"Haow?"

"I don't see how I can tell you."

"Wa-al, yeou must. Did he send yeou tew meet me?"

"Yes, ma'am, but he don't want me to bring you to the hotel."

"Wha-a-at?" shrieked Mrs. Jay.

Oliver repeated the assertion.

"Why don't he?" howled the old lady, who was getting a good deal excited. "See here, boy, yeou tell me what's goin' on—dew yeou hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

By this time the hack was on its way uptown, for Oliver had directed the driver to take a roundabout way to the hotel in order that he might have plenty of time to spin the yarn he had prepared.

"Wa-al, go on."

Oliver began:

"Mr. Jay is at the hotel."

"Yes!"

"But he is in disguise."

"In what?"

"Disguise."

"What's that?"

Oliver explained.

"Wa-al, go on."

"He is disguised as a foreign nobleman."

"Hiram Jay a nobleman?"

"Yes, ma'am. And he has assumed a fictitious name."

"What is it?"

"He calls himself the Count Majolica Cuspidore."

"Hiram Jay does?"

"Yes, ma'am. You wouldn't know him if you saw him."

"I'd know Hiram Jay anywheres."

"I don't think so, ma'am. He's got heavy black whiskers, and he puts on a foreign accent."

"He does, eh?" And Mrs. Jay gritted her teeth. "I'll fix his aecent for him when I see him."

"Yes, ma'am. But that isn't all."

"Well, go ahead."

"He and the countess don't get along well together, and——"

"The which?" shrieked Martha Ann.

"The countess."

"The caountess?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Hez—hez Hiram Jay got another wife?"

"The Count Cuspidore has got a countess, Mrs. Jay, and I am sorry to say she makes his life a burden. They have not been married long."

"Wa-al," gasped Mrs. Jay, "I wouldn't have believed it! But wait till I git there!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is—is that there woman young?"

"The countess?"

"Yes."

"About your own age, I should think, Mrs. Jay!"

"An' haow old dew yeou s'pose I be?"

"I should judge," replied Oliver, that you were between twenty-two and twenty-three."

As it was plain enough that the old lady would never see forty-three again in this world, this was a tough one.

But she swallowed it, bones and all, and replied with a smile:

"Wa-al, yeou're a good guesser, Oliver."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Here's a dime fer yeou, Oliver."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Yeou'll stand by me in this here business, Oliver?"

"Yes, ma'am, on one condition."

"An' what's that?"

"That you will never tell Mr. Jay that I betrayed him. I have only done it from a sense of duty, because I could not bear to see a young and lovely lady deceived in such a base manner."

"I won't say nothin', Oliver."

"Sure?"

"When Marthy Ann Jay sez a thing she means it," replied the old lady in a very decided manner.

"Yes, ma'am," was Oliver's meek response.

"And now," continued Mrs. Jay, "tell me suthin' abaout this here caountess, as yeou call her. Yeou say she's as young as me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is she as good-lookin'?"

"Well, like you, she is a beautiful girl, but I prefer your style of beauty."

Just then the driver, having reached Seventieth street, turned and started on his way downtown again.

"What did Hiram send fer that there hundred dollars fer?" demanded the old lady.

"Oh, he wanted to buy caramels for the countess."

"What's them?"

"Caramels? Oh, they are an expensive sort of confection of which the countess is passionately fond."

"And that was his great speculation?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Wa-al, I s'pected suthing' was in the wind. Oh, I'll fix him!"

"Yes, ma'am."

And the artless youth went on feeding Mrs. Jay assorted "caramels" throughout the remainder of their journey.

While he is thus engaged let us say a few words about the Count and Countess Cuspidore, who were not mere inventions of Oliver's, but real flesh and blood personages.

The Count Majolica Cuspidore had arrived in New York several months before, and had succeeded in obtaining a footing in good "sassiety."

He wore expensive clothes and talked a good deal about his numerous castles in Italy, and his ancestors, and all that sort of thing, and soon became a lion.

Of course he won the hearts of numerous maidens,

among them one Miss Mamie Muggs, the daughter of old Ebenezer Muggs, a wealthy retired hardware merchant.

Of all the girls who were anxious to become the Countess Cuspidore, Mamie Muggs was the most anxious; but her father, whose head was as hard as the merchandise in which he had formerly dealt, did not approve of the match.

On the contrary, he pronounced the Count of no account, declared him a fraud, and forbade him the house.

But this did not discourage the count, for Miss Muggs was the wealthiest heiress who had ever shown him any favor, so he proposed an elopement.

The girl at once consented, and the next evening the two met and were married.

The following day they returned for the paternal blessing, but they did not get it.

Quite the reverse, for old Mr. Muggs informed them that neither of them should ever enter his house again, and dismissed them in short order.

It was the old, time-worn, frayed-at-the-edges story.

The count proved to have scarcely money enough to pay for a five-cent shine, and the couple were compelled to take up their residence in a cheap Bowery hotel—the same in which Hiram Jay was pursuing his festive career.

Here at the time of Mrs. Jay's arrival in the city they had been leading a cat-and-dog life for about two weeks, and as they spent most of their time in propelling articles of bric-a-brac at each other and in other little amusements of that description, the proprietor of the house was beginning to talk of "bouncing" them—especially as they had never paid him anything except the doubtful compliment of choosing his house as their headquarters.

This being the state of affairs, and the count being a man of about Hiram's size, with a very imperfect knowledge of the English tongue, it struck Oliver that he might have a little fun and at the same time do some good.

The way in which he began the racket we have already related.

By the time the carriage reached the hotel Mrs. Jay was at boiling point, and all ready to take Hiram's scalp if she got a chance.

But the hayseed was not in sight when they alighted from the vehicle.

Oliver knew that he would not be, for it had been arranged that he was to keep out of the way until notified by the youth that it would be safe to make his appearance.

Mrs. Jay stalked into the office and rushed up to the desk, demanding:

"Is there a feller here that calls himself the Caount Cuspidore?"

"Yes, ma'am, the count has apartments here," replied the clerk

"Wa-al, yeou jest send one o' yeour niggers up with me tew show me the way, mister."

"You will have to send up your card first."

"I reck'n I won't. Jest yeou show me up there, or I'll git up alone; an' I reck'n it won't take me long tew find him, either."

Seeing that Oliver was winking at him, and getting onto the idea that some sort of a racket was on hand, the clerk, who was somewhat of a jokist himself, said:

"Very well, ma'am. Hannibal, show this lady to the Count Cuspidore's rooms."

Off started the darky, with the old lady at his heels.

While all this was going on the count and countess were having a little domestic argument in the privacy of their room.

It was commenced by the lady, who snapped:

"You are a villain!"

"You haf tolda me thata before," responded the noble count, pacing the floor and stroking his beard impatiently.

"I tell you so again, and shall have occasion to many times in the future. Oh, you brute!"

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"To take a young girl from home and parents, as you have done!"

"You no maka ze mooch objectione," sneered the nobleman.

"Oh, you wretch!"

"Bah!"

"I did not object, because you represented yourself as wealthy and noble."

The count laughed.

"You haven't as much as a dollar in your pocket."

"I expecta zat from your papa."

"You'll never get it. When papa says a thing he means it."

"We shalla see."

"And you're not only a beggar, but I don't believe you've anyright to your pretended title."

"How dara you! You insulta me!"

"Insult you? That would be impossible. I don't believe that you're a count at all; I dare say you have another wife in Italy."

The count uttered a large, dark-red malediction in his native tongue and seized a vase.

His bride picked up an instand, and in another instant both these articles would have been sailing through space had not the door suddenly burst open and Martha Ann rushed in.

"A wife in Italy!" she shrieked. "No, he's got one right here, an' I'm the woman. You pesky scoundrel!"

And she made a rush for the count, who retreated behind a chair.

"You his wife?" piped the countess.

"Yes, I be."

"But you are not an Italian?"

"Me? I reck'n not."

"Did—did he marry you in this country?"

"Yes, he did."

"It as falsa!" interposed the count.

"Don't yeou say that ag'in, yeou varmint," yelled Mrs. Jay. "Oh, I know yeou in spite o' yeour whiskers an' yeour furrin' way o' talkin'."

"I——"

"Shet up! Yeou've got an accaount tew settle with me."

"And I am not his wife at all," sobbed the countess.

"No, yeou ain't," said Martha Ann, "but yeou hain't lost much in losin' him."

"Oh, the fiend!"

"That's jest what he is. Oh, let me get at him!"

"Me too!"

Then both women "went for" the noble count.

They caught him and began pummeling him in a style that would have made Sullivan shed tears of envy.

They made as much noise as a boiler factory in full blast, and the landlord came rushing up in a frightful rage.

"This is too much," he howled as he disengaged the

countess' hands from her husband's hair. "I've stood all I care to from you. Get out of my house, both of you."

And the ubiquitous Oliver, with his usual diplomacy, succeeded in getting the enraged Martha Ann out of the room by whispering in her shell-like ear that her back haid was falling off and her sack was ripped under the arm.

In five minutes quiet ranged.

The count and countess were gone and Martha Ann was arranging her toilet in the privacy of a room that had been assigned to her.

And Oliver was quietly seated in the hotel parlor looking at the pictures of the actresses in the advertising album with a couldn't-do-wrong-if-I-wanted-to expression of countenance.

Mrs. Jay had promised to join him in the parlor when she was presentable again, and in about ten minutes she appeared.

"Thought yeou was never a-comin'," he said. "Has she come?"

"Oh, yes, sir. She is awaiting you in the parlor of the hotel."

"Did she seem riled?"

"Well, she was somewhat excited. She took a notion that she didn't like the Count Cuspidore, and she tried to wipe up the floor with him."

"That's Marthy Ann ev'ry time. I s'pose the cuss 'nsulted her. Oh, she's clear grit."

As he entered the hotel parlor, Martha Ann galloped forward and seized him by the hair.

"So yeou've got your fancy duds off, hev yeou?" she shouted. "I'll l'arn you! Take this, and this, and this!"

Then explanations—partial explanations—ensued.

As she kept her word and did not "give away" Oliver, the whole truth did not come out, and the youth escaped scot free, and was at liberty to go ahead and



IN ANOTHER MINUTE BOTH ARTICLES WOULD HAVE BEEN SAILING THROUGH SPACE HAD NOT THE DOOR SUDDENLY BURST OPEN AND MARTHA ANN RUSHED IN.

"Wa-al, haow dew I look naow?" she asked.

"As lovely as ever," replied Oliver.

"Air they gone?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Dew yeou s'pose Hiram'll ever come back a'gin?"

"Certainly I do. In fact, I believe I could find him for you now if you wanted me to."

"Wa-al, go an' dew it."

"I'll send him with his disguise off. But promise me two things."

"What be they?"

"First, that you will never betray me to him."

"I hev promised that."

"And secondly that you will forgive him."

"Humph! jest yeou send him here, an' don't worry yeoursel' 'bout whether I fergive him or not. Git!"

"Yes, ma'am."

He knew just where to find Hiram; the hayseed was waiting for him in a saloon not far from the hotel.

think up other schemes for the discomfiture of his fellow-man, woman and child.

CHAPTER IX.

OLIVER IN SOUTH DUSENBURY.

"Wa-al," said Hiram to Oliver, a few hours after the stirring events which we struggled so violently to describe in our last word-painting, "wa-al, I s'pose this 'baout ends my visit tew York—darn the luck!"

"Why, you've always been saying that you wanted to go back to South Dusenbury," said Oliver.

"Wa-al, I dew, kinder, an' yet when I see Marthy Ann I kinder weaken ontew the idee."

"Why don't you stay here a while longer, then, sir?"

"Gum-swizzle it, she wouldn't let me."

Martha Ann entered the room.

"We're a-goin' back tew Saouth Dusenbury by the next train. Hold on! Say, yeou, Oliver!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Yeou kin go along fer a visit ef yeou want tew."

"Me, Mrs. Jay?" exclaimed the youth, rolling his eyes in pretended ecstasy.

"Yes, yeou. Dew yeou wanter?"

"Want to? It has been the dream of my life to visit South Dusenbury," gushed Oliver. "You do not know how very, very happy you have made me, Mrs. Jay."

"I dunno 'baout this," interrupted Hiram. "I don't b'lieve South Dusenbury would agree with Oliver."

The truth was, he was afraid that if the youth went there he would "give away" some of his rackets in the city, and he thought it much safer for him to remain in New York.

But Oliver was "on to" him and burst in with:

"Oh, Mr. Jay, how can you say so? Why, my physician ordered country air for me weeks ago, and I thought of asking you to send me on some in bottles after you got home. But to visit you—oh, what rapture!"

"Wa-al——"

"To hear the babbling brooks, the merry birds, the lowing kine!" went on Oliver, with pretended wild enthusiasm. "Oh, Mr. Jay, do your kine low?"

"I——"

"Because if they don't habitually do so, perhaps you would be willing to use your influence with them to indulge in a few lows for the benefit of a little boy who has been brought up amid the temptations of a great city, yet has preserved his name untarnished."

"Oliver——"

"Your brooks, of course, babble whenever the weather permits, and your birds are merry? I would not give a cent for a bird who was not in a constant state of merriment. I trust that they also flit from bough to bough. You will think me a real silly little thing, Mrs. Jay, but I have never seen a bird flit. I suppose yours are that kind?"

"Oliver what be yeou a-talkin' 'baout?" gasped the old lady.

But the youth paid no attention to the question.

"Then I am so anxious to see the village green, the aged church with its moss-grown pastor, the happy peasants chanting their harvest songs, the village humorist, the sewing circle, horny-handed reapers, the real chickens."

"I——"

"A farmhouse, Mrs. Jay, with its fresh eggs and fresh ducks, its foaming milk, its golden butter, its salt pork, and its evening prayers, has always had an irresistible charm for my childish fancy. I accept your invitation willingly, gladly. When shall we start?"

"Right naow."

"I dunno 'baout——" began Hiram.

"Wa-al, I dew!" interposed Mrs. Jay. "Hiram!"

"Wa-al?"

"Go an' git ready. What be yeou standin' raound this way fer?"

With a deep sigh Hiram wandered out of the room.

"He don't want me to go," mused Oliver as he strolled over to the window and gazed pensively at a dog fight on the other side of the street. "That is unkind, after all I have done for him. The idea of acting as a professional guardian angel for all these weeks at fifty cents a day, and then being refused the slight pleasure of contracting the malaria and bruising my-

self from head to foot by sleeping on a corn-cob bed! Revenge! Shall I assume a black cloak, a slouch hat and a walk like a trained bear, become an abandoned stage villain and betray him to those who have known and loved him?—cause them to turn from him with loathing and exit C? Aha! I am observed!"

"What be yeou a-mutterin' 'baout?" inquired Mrs. Jay.

"No matter, ma'am. Aha, he comes!"

Hiram entered the room, carpet-bag in hand.

They were just in time to catch the train.

Poor Hiram was evidently loath to leave New York, but he did not dare say a word.

Hiram and Mrs. Jay lunched on some cookies that she had brought from home. Oliver refused any, but slid off by and by and got a solid meal in the dining-room car.

After leaving the train they took a stage-coach which finally deposited them in front of the South Dusenbury post-office.

A group of natives were assembled on the porch, and they were slightly effusive in their greetings.

"Why, Mis' Jay!"

"I wanter knaow ef it's yeou!"

"So yeou've brought the deakin back!"

"She said she'd dew it, an' she hez."

"Deakin Jay, how be ye?"

"Wa-al, ef yeou ain't lookin' spruce, deakin!"

"Who's the boy?" asked someone.

Then Oliver stepped forward.

"Mr. Jay's child protege," he announced. Everyone stared at him.

"Pretty Jay!" gasped an old farmer with a voice like a saw file. "I didn't know the deakin had no children."

"He ain't, neither," snorted Martha Ann, "an' that ain't his name. He's Oliver Sudden, a boy that's been a-workin' fer the deakin down tew York, an' we've brought him up here tew kinder give him an idee haow folks live up this way."

"Exactly, gentlemen," added Oliver briskly as he shook hands with each member of the crowd. "And I must say that what I have already seen fills me with wonder."

"I wanter know!" chorused three or four old fossils.

"Such intelligence and beauty——"

"Haow yeou talk!"

"Such rare culture——"

"Wa-al, naow!"

"And such mingled affability and quiet reserve it never has been my good fortune to meet, although I have traveled extensively in New Jersey and Long Island."

The hayseeds were fairly bewildered by this volubility, but Hiram, who had some faint idea of Oliver's methods, growled out:

"Guess yeou'd better give yer jaw a rest, Oliver, ef yeou don't want tew fracture it."

"Shet up, Hiram Jay!" snapped Martha Ann.

Then she introduced our hero to the gang.

Deacon Fosdick, Squire Griswold, Elder Pettibone and Messrs. Skidmore, Johnson, Smith and Jones were the names by which a few of these rural notables were identified, and Oliver greeted them all enthusiastically as their respective titles were called off by the old lady.

"Wa-al, here comes Hez at last," said Hiram with a sigh of relief as a carryall of the time of Rameses II. hove in sight, drawn by a blond horse of about the

same period, who looked like a skeleton with a section of a circus tent drawn tightly over it.

In a few minutes they were on their way to the farmhouse, and Oliver heard such remarks from the group on the porch as:

"Mighty likely young un."

"Smart ez a steel trap."

"Wonder where the deakin got him?"

"He ain't no derved fule, b'gosh!"

"Well, I am appreciated by these untutored children of nature, anyhow," mused the youth. "I must cultivate them and see if I can't afford them some wholesale amusement ere I go hence, perhaps never to return until I get back."

That evening Oliver had a long talk with Hiram and found out a good deal about the neighborhood.

He discovered that the leading citizen was Deacon Fosdick, and he at once decided to pay the deacon a visit in the morning.

"Wa-al, I dunno's Deakin Jay is sich a terrible great man."

Seeing that the worthy deacon was slightly affected with the green-eyed monster, Oliver hastened to add:

"What I was thinking most of was that the reception would give all the folks a chance to hear you speak."

The deacon smiled.

"Wa-al, I s'pose I could make a few remarks."

"Of course you could, deacon. The affair could come off at the church."

"At the meetin'-house? Wa-al, I dunno but it could."

"Certainly it could. There could be singing, playing, recitations, and an oration by yourself."

"Dunno but I kinder like the idee," smirked the deacon.

"I should think so. Deacon Jay could also speak, and I would like to make a few remarks myself."

"Yeou?"

"Yes, sir. I have appeared in public before."



HIRAM, WHO COULD STAND NO MORE, JUMPED UP AND MADE A GRAB FOR THE YOUTH. OLIVER SENT OUT HIS FOOT AND THE OLD MAN WENT HEADLONG OFF THE PLATFORM.

He did so, telling neither Hiram nor Martha Ann anything about his intention.

He found the deacon sitting on his front stoop, whittling a pine shingle.

"Haow de dew?" said the old man, recognizing him at once. "Le's see—yeou're the boy that Deakin Jay brought home, ben't yeou?"

"I am the child to whom you refer," replied Oliver, "and I have business with you, deacon."

"Business with me?"

"Yes, deacon; business of importance."

"What is it?"

"Deacon Jay has been away a long time?"

"Wa-al, he hez."

"He is highly respected in these parts, is he not?"

"Wa-al, we've allers looked upon the deakin ez a mighty clever man."

"Exactly. Well, do you not think that it would be advisable to tender him a reception, now that he has returned to his native place again?"

"Won't you be skeered?"

"Oh, I shall be terrified in the extreme, but I feel that it is my duty and I will do it."

"Wa-al, jest as yeou say, Oliver. Guess we kin fix the thing up atween us."

"Oh, yes, sir."

And the youth continued to spout on the subject, flattering the old man's vanity until he had worked him into a state of considerable enthusiasm over the proposed reception.

It was decided that the affair should come off on the following Thursday evening at the church, and the deacon went down to the village printing office at once to get a lot of invitations struck off.

When Hiram heard of the intentions of his fellow-citizens he was immensely flattered.

"Wa-al," he commented modestly, "'tain't no more'n I deserve, but it's a darned sight more'n I expected, b'gosh. But I'll git up a speech that'll surprise 'em—gum-swizzled ef I don't."

In a day or two the one great sensation in South Dusenbury was the approaching reception to "Deakin Jay."

In the meantime Oliver was continually hustling, and before the eventful evening he had made friends of all South Dusenbury, particularly the juvenile portion.

Before the eventful evening arrived a programme of considerable interest and variety had been arranged, and the boys were all anticipating a high old time.

Thursday came, and with it cold weather. The thermometer was trying to crawl out at the bottom of the tube, and the sexton of the church built up an extra big fire.

At eight o'clock the church was packed to the doors and all hands were ready for business.

The exercises were opened by the village choir who sang "Hark from the Tombs a Doleful Sound."

Oliver gritted his teeth and bore it, reflecting that his turn would come by and by.

After the anthem, Deacon Fosdick got up and started in on his great speech.

But he did not get a chance to "spread" himself as much as he had expected, for when he had been going about fifteen minutes and was just getting warmed up, a window behind the pulpit suddenly flew open, as if by magic, and in came a shower of cats of all varieties.

And every mother's son and daughter of them landed on Deacon Fosdick.

In about four seconds they had yanked his wig and spectacles off, and made his face look like a map of the Dark Continent, or even more so.

The old man let off a series of howls that could have been heard for a mile or less, and then struck for the door, the cats clinging to all parts of his anatomy.

In an instant he had disappeared, and his yells rapidly died away in the distance.

Then Hiram struggled to his feet. But he was so nervous that he forgot everything he had intended to say, and after a few incoherent remarks flopped back into his seat, amid the laughter of the audience.

Oliver did not allow a stage wait to occur.

Leaping to his feet he began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen: I, though but a child, have been permitted to spout a few spouts on this momentous occasion.

"We have all listened to Deacon Jay's remarks with an absorbing interest that has only been equaled by our lack of interest, if I may be permitted the expression.

"I have known and loved Hiram Jay.

"I have seen him under many circumstances, but I have always found him the same, except when different.

"I have seen him with his arm around the waist of a dime museum burlesque fairy.

"I have seen him, while he was under the influence of extract of rye, attempt to wind his watch with his umbrella, and to go to sleep in the coal scuttle.

"I have witnessed his demeanor when he stood before the bar of justice and was reprimanded for swindling.

"But never, ladies and gentlemen, have I known him to be any different from what he was.

"To this I must testify—that, drunk or sober——"

At this point in the oration, Hiram, who could stand no more, jumped up and made a grab for the youth.

Oliver saw him and sent out his foot.

The old man stumbled and went headlong off the platform.

Then, in response to a pre-arranged signal from Oliver, four boys who sat under the four kerosene lamps that illuminated the church, blew out the lights.

The audience made a grand rush for the door just as one of the boys threw a big handful of red pepper on the stove, and then, with his companions, skipped out of the windows.

The way that audience sneezed ought to have been enough to blow the roof off the church, but it didn't.

Everyone struck out for the open country, but the majority of them did not get far before they took a drop.

Some of Oliver's fellow conspirators had poured about ten gallons of water on the front porch of the church and it had frozen at once.

At the time that the lights were turned out it would have made an Al skating pond, but was not adapted to rapid transit in any other manner.

The first one out was Elder Pettibone, and over he went, with Squire Griswold and a dozen or two others on top of him.

And in a very few minutes nearly the entire audience was kicking and squirming on the porch, and the yells and groans that rent the otherwise stilly night air would have been painful to any ears save those of Oliver and his young "pals."

But above the din there rose a clarion voice and this is what it remarked:

"This here is that there Oliver Sudden's work. Jest let me get at him onct, an' I'll be gum-swizzled ef I leave enough o' him tew bury."

It was Hiram.

He had tumbled at last.

The boy, oh, where was he?

Ask us an easy one.

He was never again seen in South Dusenbury.

The next morning he might have been seen seated in the reading room of a New York hotel, perusing with tear-dimmed eyes an account (at space rates) of a singular accident at a reception in South Dusenbury.

No one had been seriously hurt, the paper said, and it might have been much worse.

"Just my luck," mused the youth regretfully as he threw the journal aside.

A few days later he received a letter from the South Dusenbury village lawyer in which a suit for damages from Hiram was threatened.

But the suit was never begun, and from that day to this Oliver has never met his one-time friend and alleged protector, HIRAM, THE HAYSEED.

[THE END.]

The next great sensational story to be published in the Old Cap. Collier Library will be "THE CRUISE OF THE ALVAREDO; OR, TRACKING THE SMUGGLERS TO THEIR LAIR," by the author of "Frank Bolton's Chase." This is a splendid story, boys, being the companion story of and sequel to "On Board the Alvaredo." It will be published in No. 822 of the Old Cap Collier Library, out next Saturday. Price 5 cents. For sale by all newsdealers.

RALPH F. CUMMINGS